SHORT STORIES

JUNE 21 1D

WHEN THE MILLIONAIRE RETURNED TO HIS SEAT, HIS POCKET-BOOK WAS GONE! (A dramatic incident from "The Confessions of a Lady's Companion.")

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Cynthia, Her Companion.

II.—MY COUSIN ROBS THE MILLIONAIRE.

SIR JOHN STRICKLAND travelled up to town with us, and lightened the journey, for Frances at all events, by delicate attentions in the way of flowers, fruit, and luncheon baskets.

"Do you think it quite wise to go to the Cecil?" he asked my cousin as we steamed into Charing Cross; "you are not very strong, you know, and hotel life is hardly restful. Let me urge you once again to stay with my sister for a week or two at all events."

"You are so good, Sir John," said Frances softly, "and it's quite sweet of Mrs. Ponsonby to wish to have me. But as I told you, I've a lot of tiresome business to get through. I shall have to see solicitors, trustees, and all sorts of horrid people that I couldn't possibly inflict on your sister."

Sir John sighed, but did not further contest the point.

"Promise me at all events you won't do too much?" he said, as he placed her beside me in the hansom.

"I'll take care of myself," Frances returned lightly. "I shall expect you to-morrow afternoon, mind."

"Of course!" He clasped her hand closely, then waved adieu.

I caught a glimpse of him as he stood upon the pavement, watching us out of sight. The wintry sunshine lit up his face and figure; tall and erect, there was something inflexible—I had said implacable—in his attitude, but his face wore a sad, almost wistful, expression, and his eyes looked tired.

Frances waited about three minutes, then gave a deep sigh and leant back in the cab.

"Thank Heaven, that is over!" she said, and relapsed into silence.

I suppose she meant the journey, still she had not seemed so very fatigued, but perhaps that was merely from politeness to Sir John.

Fluffy met us in the courtyard of the Cecil, his hands plunged in his pockets, and his face pursed in a smile.

"I've engaged your rooms all right," he said, "hope you'll like 'em."

Frances beamed upon him. Then:

"See to the luggage, will you, Fluffy, like a dear boy? Ella's such an awful fool!"

Fluffy nodded, and, leaving him to look after her boxes and her maid, Frances sailed into the entrance-hall of the hotel, a spacious place and almost too well lit, with comfortable lounges, decorative palms, and a profusion of mirrors and soft-footed attendants.

Our rooms were on the third floor and faced the river. It must, I thought, be charming on a summer's day to look upon the gardens that fringe the Embankment, and the trees that grow almost to the water's edge, but in January—despite beds of bright-coloured crocus and early hyacinth, the earth looked bare, and the river gleamed cold and grey under a steely sun.

"Draw down the blinds," commanded Frances, switching on the electric light. "I hate the river on a day like this."

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She stood and watched me from the hearthrug, her fine brows drawn together. Frances looked well that afternoon, she wore a heavy coat of sealskin with a toque to match. The rich, dark fur threw up the whiteness of her skin, and brought out the gold of her hair.

"You are charming!" said Fluffy, who shortly reappeared, "but"—he looked at her critically—"also, I think, a little cross. What is it?" and with astonishing familiarity he patted her shoulder.

This unexpected development surprised me. Hitherto Fluffy had been a devout but a dumb adorer. Now he seemed suddenly to have found his tongue, and—well, something else beside.

Frances did not snub him. "I've got the blues," she said. "No, I don't want tea, I feel more like champagne. Ring, will you?"

"It must have been the thought of Mrs. Ponsonby that depressed me, I feel better now," she remarked a few minutes later. "Thanks," as Fluffy refilled her glass, "it is worth while to have endured Sir John for three weeks, if only to appreciate how good life is without him. Cynthia," she called to me abruptly, "what are you staring at? Give her some wine, Fluffy; she's too dull for words."

"I don't like it, thank you," I replied.

Frances protested; Fluffy quietly filled a glass and turned to me.

"I should run away a bit, if I were you," he said softly, "your cousin's tired." He held the door open, and, as I passed, whispered, "Have a fire lit in your room, you know, and order tea. Make yourself comfortable, won't you?" He smiled quite nicely as he spoke, and, though it seemed strange that Fluffy should concern himself about me, I felt grateful.

I enjoyed my fire and the tea was lovely. I can't understand anyone preferring champagne to tea!

Frances sent for me about eight o'clock. She was dressed for dinner in a wonderful gown of scarlet chiffon, the bodice veiled with a glittering net of gold and jewels. It was cut very low, with a bunch of flowers for sleeves, and showed her neck and arms to great advantage. There were pearls round her throat, and in her hair glittered Fluffy's latest gift—the diamond pins. She had a vivid colour, and looked quite good-tempered. Fluffy was there also; he was not staying at the Cecil, he had rooms in the Temple.

"Good gracious, child!" exclaimed my cousin, "you can't go down like that!" and she pointed scornfully to my white cashmere.

"It's the same frock I wore at Lady Winchin's," I protested, "you never found any fault with it before!"

"As if it mattered what you wore at Lady Winchin's! Nobody troubled about you there, but here it's very different. I simply couldn't sit down with a gown like that beside me."

"Let her have dinner up here to-night," said Fluffy, interposing once more on my behalf; "you can get her some frills to-morrow."

"Nonsense!" retorted Frances. "I can't go down without another woman—with you at all events," and she grinned at him maliciously. "Here," she whirled me impetuously into her bedroom, "I'll soon put you to rights. Ella, where's that white blouse—not that one, stupid!" as the bewildered maid groped wildly in a box. "This!" and my cousin seized hold of a sweet thing, all frills and lace. In a second she routed out a skirt to match—we were much of a height with perhaps an inch in my favour—and dressed me in the two.

"Curling tongs, Ella," she said laconically, and waved and crimped my hair till I did not recognise my own head.

"That's better!" she said at last, turning me round like a child. "Well, do you like yourself?" and she pushed me half-laughing towards the glass.

I must confess that I quite liked myself; so I think did Fluffy. He stared at me very hard when I went into the sitting-room. I noticed that the men downstairs did the same thing.

Never before had I been looked at quite that way. It is strange the effect crimped hair seems to have—or perhaps it was the blouse.

We had a table to ourselves downstairs in the dining-room—a splendid room, large and handsomely decorated. There were tables up and down the room of various sizes, at some were two or four persons, others held a larger party. All the tables were beautifully laid with shining plate and glass, and lit by silver lamps with pretty pink shades. There were little glass bowls on most of the tables filled with carnations and ferns.

All the men were in evening dress, and the women wore exquisite frocks. I recognised some from their portraits in the society papers. I picked out four actresses, a countess, and an Australian beauty. It was quite exciting, almost like meeting old friends.

It was very pleasant to sit there at dinner, nicely dressed, and with nice people about one. I could not help feeling glad that I had joined the smart set, if only as a lady companion.

"Frankie," said Fluffy, pausing over his fish, "do you see those two men at the next table—the one at your right, I mean?"

"What of them?"

"The man with the goatee beard and the sandy hair is Hiram Pettigrew, the American millionaire. I don't know who the other chap is."

Frances did not seem to hear the last part of this remark, she was looking intently at the millionaire, studying his face with those strange eyes of hers, that, to me, never seemed twice alike. To-night they were brilliant as diamonds, and as fascinating. The American seemed to feel their influence, he turned his head sharply towards her and stared in open, undisguised admiration. For a second or two she held his gaze, then slowly drooped her eyelids and went on calmly with her dinner.

Later in the evening when Frankie and I were in our sitting room upstairs, Fluffy burst in upon us much excited.

"What do you think of this?" he shouted, brandishing a piece of pasteboard between his thumb and first finger.

Frances snatched the card from him, and read out the name of "Hiram Pettigrew." She laughed as she read, then dropped the card upon the table and leant back in her favourite attitude against the mantelpiece.

A smile twitched at her lips, and she stroked her arm in a slow, caressing fashion, as she had a trick of doing when deep in thought.

For some strange reason her attitude seemed to ruffle the even-tempered Fluffy. His face grew quite red and he snapped his fingers two or three times.

"Pettigrew's married—married," he almost shouted, and glared at Frances defiantly.

"What of it?" she returned with a shrug. "I'm not interested in the man, but the millionaire. I suppose he is the real thing? One is so taken in these days, and Yankees are not always what they seem."

"There's no doubt that Pettigrew is the genuine article," said Fluffy, suddenly grown calm. "I've made that quite certain."

"Well?" Frances took up the card again and glanced from it to Fluffy. He nodded mysteriously in answer.

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"Pettigrew has asked me to introduce him to you. He's going to call here, with me, to-morrow morning for that purpose. His secretary is coming also."

Frances smiled.

"I shall be pleased to see him and his secretary also," she replied.

The millionaire turned up to time the following morning. He was a tall man, carelessly dressed, whose clothes hung loosely on his gaunt limbs. There was a look of power about his face, he had piercing eyes, and a humorous, kindly mouth.

He possessed great financial ability, and had engineered some marvellous scoops on Wall Street, but, so his secretary told me, he was as careless as clever, and would leave most important documents lying about his room together with cheques and notes.

It fell to my share to entertain the secretary—by name Percival Hope. He was very tall and distinguished looking, with grave blue eyes and very white teeth. He was quiet in manner and not a bit smart—otherwise Frances would not have ignored him—but I liked him all the better for that, I felt more at home.

Our parties soon grew very friendly, and exchanged visits daily. I don't think Sir John Strickland much approved of the acquaintance, he was so cold to Pettigrew on the few occasions that he met him. Sir John didn't see much of Frances those days, she was too busy, she declared, with her solicitor, to spare him more than an occasional half hour. I don't know when she managed to find time for her solicitor, for she was driving and shopping with Pettigrew most mornings and some afternoons.

My cousin playfully declared that she was going to launch the American into Society "right away." She certainly introduced some radical changes in his appearance. He was compelled to don Bond Street clothes, patent boots, and fashionable collars.

"He really is improved," I whispered to Percival Hope the first time Pettigrew appeared, immaculate in frock coat and light grey trousers.

"I prefer him in his old get-up, he looks more natural. But after all it doesn't matter what he wears, the man's such a real good sort, Miss Hamilton. I've never met anyone like him, I don't think there is another as generous and open-hearted. The worst of it is he's always being imposed on."

The secretary frowned as he spoke and glanced towards Frances, who was lecturing the millionaire on the folly of keeping things in the breast pocket of his coat.

"You can't expect a coat to set if you cram all this rubbish into it," she protested, drawing out a packet of letters, a handkerchief, and a pocket book, this last considerably the worse for wear.

"You are not to keep anything in this pocket at all. Your handkerchief you put up your sleeve—so," she tucked it in place with a pretty gesture. "Your letters, if you are a wise man, you will burn, and your pocket book—" she gave an exclamation as she picked it up. "Mr. Pettigrew, you are too dreadfully careless! You are actually carrying bank notes to an immense amount in a pocket book that is split up at the sides."

He laughed, and recaptured his property. "It's an old friend of mine," he said, "that pocket book and I have been through some rough times together, and I don't care to part with it. Still I admit it isn't very safe."

"It's most dangerous," cried Frances, "and must not be allowed to continue. Come out with me at once, and I'll buy you a proper pocket book, not a thing like that."

She swept him off, and when they reappeared at lunch Pettigrew was proud as a child of his new possession—a pocket book of green crocodile leather, mounted in silver. I did not think it quite up to the level of Frances' usual taste. She prided herself on being original, but this, though quite neat, was very ordinary. It was handsome and expensive, but one saw its facsimile in shop windows every day. Hiram, however, saw no fault in his new pocket book, and was more careless than ever in leaving it about.

One evening Pettigrew announced he had secured a box for Her Majesty's Theatre. I did not, as a rule, accompany Frances to the play, but this night she told me that I was to go. She had bought me some very pretty frocks, amongst them a pale pink silk, smothered in chiffon, which I wore. Ella did my hair, and when I was dressed Frances lent me a row of pearls for my neck.

Just as we were going to start Ella appeared with a cardboard box addressed to me. I opened it, and found the most exquisite spray of pale pink roses, a shade deeper than the frock I was wearing.

"You're commencing early, Cynthia," said Frances. "Who have you been making love to?"

She tossed the flowers out of the box as she spoke and discovered a gentleman's card.

"I thought as much," she said with a laugh, "here, my dear, read it for yourself, 'Mr. Percival Hope.'"

"How kind of him," I exclaimed. "Just fancy his remembering that I was going to wear pink."

"He's as poor as a church mouse," said Frances. "You're a fool, Cynthia, if you have anything to say to him. But then girls always are fools."

"Why Frankie, it's not long since you were a girl yourself."

My cousin gave a quick sigh. "My dear," she said, and laid her hand upon my shoulder, "I am, what you never will be—a smart woman. Now come along or we shall be late."

I enjoyed the play very much. Frances and I sat in front of the box, the millionaire and his secretary behind us. Fluffy did not appear till the play was half over. He did not look at all well and said he was tired.

During the interval Frances recognised a lot of people in the house, she seemed bowing all the time, and attracted a good deal of attention. She was looking very well, and wonderfully young, in a black gown with deep red roses.

Suddenly she gave a little exclamation, and turned quite pink.

"There's Lord Kinross, Cynthia," she said. "He's coming up."

His Lordship said he was very fit, and seemed delighted at meeting my cousin.

"I've been in Paris," he explained, "only got back yesterday. Where are you?"

"At the Cecil for the present, until I can find a house to suit me."

"House hunting is a fearful bore. You should employ an agent."

"So Mr. Pettigrew tells me. He says they manage these things much better in New York. I don't know if you have met each other—Lord Kinross—Mr. Pettigrew."

His lordship seemed to like the American, and accepted Frankie's invitation to join us at supper very readily. As Lord Kinross left the box—after the interval—he encountered Percival Hope, who had gone to fetch me an ice. Instead of passing on, they stood quite still, gazing intently at each other, Kinross half frowning as though anger were struggling with surprise, while Hope kept an unmoved face. Then, with an abrupt salutation, half bow, half nod, Kinross passed him with a short "good-night"—a greeting which the secretary returned with one as curt.

The incident struck me as remarkable—the more so as Percival did not allude to it, nor to Lord Kinross, though I gave him plenty of opportunity for so doing. Frances had not observed this piece of byplay, and I did not tell her of it.

From Her Majesty's we went to supper at the Café Regal. They had reserved a table for us, but the place was so crowded we could [illegible] to move, and the people were quite close to us on either side. We had over so many things for supper, chicken mayonnaise, truffles, aspic jelly, and all sorts of delicious sweets. I sat by Percival, who looked after me carefully, but was very silent.

Our table was long and narrow, Fluffy sat at one end, Pettigrew at the other, with Frances on his right. Lord Kinross was next to her, Percival and I sat opposite.

We lingered a long time over supper, conversation was brilliant, and the champagne must have been excellent, even I found it tolerable. At the end, Pettigrew called for the bill; taking out his pocket book he extracted a note.

The waiter hurried off to get it changed. The American leaning his arm upon the table resumed his talk with Frances, the pocket book meanwhile lying by his plate—between him and Percival. Frances was very fascinating that night, she smiled at the millionaire in a soft bewitching fashion that seemed to daze him, for he stopped short in the middle of a sentence and flushed up to his temples.

I was watching Lord Kinross to see how he liked this little *entr'acte*, when I caught sight of Fluffy's face. It was ghastly, with a greenish pallor, and his eyes were fixed in a stare.

"Frances, look!" I cried, and half rose from my seat. In a minute all was confusion, Pettigrew impetuously rushed to Fluffy's end of the table and poured brandy down his throat; we all gathered round him, and the people from the other tables left their seats.

The brandy did poor Fluffy good, though he still looked very queer. When he was better, and things had quietened down a bit, we had another shock.

Pettigrew's pocket book had disappeared.

"I must have knocked it off in my hurry as I passed," said he. "I expect it tumbled underneath the table." At once, in that foolish way people have when anything is dropped, we all commenced to grope upon the floor, going on our knees the better to find it, the people from the other tables helping us to look.

We were all tremendously excited, and when I discovered the pocket book just by my chair I gave a scream of delight.

"Here you are, Mr. Pettigrew. I am so glad."

"You're real smart, Miss Cynthia," he said, "and thank you."

Altogether it had been a very eventful evening, and I felt glad to find myself in a hansom with Percival, on our homeward way. Frances had gone on with Pettigrew, Lord Kinross having undertaken to see Fluffy to his chambers.

Percival was very quiet, and his face looked grave, almost stern, in the lamplight. Once I asked him if he had had a nice evening, but he answered so shortly that I did not speak again. I felt hurt at his manner, and was inclined to wish he had never sent me any roses.

I went straight to my room when we reached the "Cecil," and had been in bed some half an hour when there came a great knocking at my door. I sprang up quickly and flew to open it. A tall, gaunt figure faced me.

"Your cousin—please fetch her quickly, I want to speak to her. Yes, it's I—Pettigrew."

Throwing on a wrapper I hurried across the landing, but the knocking had already roused my cousin, she had unlocked her door and came to meet me.

"What is the matter?" she exclaimed, and brushed past into the sitting room, where Pettigrew was waiting.

"Oh, what has happened?" she asked. "Are you ill?"

"No, not that. I've been robbed, held up, stripped of every cent that I had about me."

Frances drew a deep breath, and leant heavily against a chair.

"My pocket book that your cousin Cynthia picked up under the table has been emptied of its contents—not a dollar, not a cent left—nothing but these," and he held out some newspaper cuttings, some telegraph forms, and a few old envelopes.

"I don't understand," said Frances. "Sit down and tell me quietly just what has happened."

He responded to her influence, and grew calmer.

"I went to my room some five minutes since, and as usual took my papers and pocket book out of my coat. On looking through the latter I found the contents had been tampered with. Bank notes for some four thousand pounds, a cheque, and a letter of credit—in all some eight thousand, were missing. The pocket book was not out of my possession all the evening, except when I left it on the table while I helped that poor chap Fluffy. In that short time someone was quick enough to snatch the book, grab the contents, and throw it back under the table, where Miss Cynthia found it."

"*Someone*," said Frances, with strange emphasis, and glanced towards the door. Percival Hope was standing just inside.

"Some swell mobsman, I suppose," said Hiram, "there's always a lot about, though one doesn't look to find them at a supper party at a fashionable café. It's a heavy loss—and I felt mad when I discovered it. Otherwise I wouldn't have disturbed you." He shrugged his shoulders, and smiled, with an effort at his usual good humour.

"Where did you find the pocket book, Cynthia?" said Frances, gravely. "Tell me the exact spot."

"It was under my chair," I said; "at least just between mine and Mr. Hope's."

"You left the pocket book almost at Mr. Hope's elbow, did you not, Mr. Pettigrew?" asked Frances.

"Yes. It's lucky for the thief Percival didn't spot him, he wouldn't have gone scot free, I bet," and the millionaire gave the secretary a look almost of affection.

"Considering Mr. Hope was so *very close*, it is strange he did not see when the pocket book went."

Percival came a step or two towards her.

"It is never wise to see too much," he said in a low voice.

Frances glanced at him quickly, for a second her face turned white, but only for a second.

"I can understand your thinking so," she retorted; then turning to the millionaire, she spoke with a sudden quiet dignity.

"I am more sorry than I can say for your loss, especially as it took place when we were enjoying your hospitality. Anything I can do——"

The American interrupted—"My dear lady," he protested, "my dear, dear lady." He took her hand and gently pressed it.

"Forgive me for disturbing you at such an hour," he said. "It was immensely selfish of me. Your kindness and sympathy are my sole excuse."

"Those at least you will never loose," she answered softly.

Hiram bowed profoundly and withdrew.

The story of the pocket book and the stolen notes created a tremendous impression at the hotel. The excitement soon died away, however, in view of the fact that the millionaire was shortly leaving England. His wife was suddenly taken ill, he explained, and had cabled for him. His secretary, Mr. Hope, did not accompany him, however; he remained in London, though not at the Cecil, to try and trace the stolen notes.

We had now been at the hotel some three weeks, and Frances had commenced

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to grumble at expenses. Shortly after Pettigrew's departure, however, she received her dividends—they were paid at very irregular and unexpected intervals—and announced her intention of looking for a house in earnest.

It was while turning out my box in view of the expected removal, that I made a terrible discovery.

I can remember how it happened and what I felt to this hour.

The bedroom with its pale chintz hangings, the bright fire, my frocks, pretty new frocks that Frances had bought me, scattered round, and I pale faced, and horrified seated on the floor, with a parched throat and a dreadful sinking at my heart.

This was my discovery. At the bottom of my box, tightly wedged in a corner between a pair of shoes and a writing-case, was a small flat packet in tissue paper. Carelessly I undid it, and there fell on my lap a pocket book of green crocodile leather, mounted in silver!

[Next Week: "We Take a House in Pont Street."]

An Attempt to Blackmail.

The Story of a Revenge which Failed.

"The plain truth is," he muttered, as he flung himself into a chair in the extreme corner of the smoking-room, "I hate Ronald Barron and I'm hard up. Is there any way of paying off a grudge of that kind with profit to myself at the same time? That's the question!"

It was a difficult question to answer, and Walter Menzies took a long time to think about it; his cigar went out during the process, while the varying expression of his countenance testified to the strength and nature of the sentiments aroused. Hatred, bitter hatred, was the dominant expression; anger, cruelty and fiendish pleasure were also apparent. They might not have shown themselves so plainly on those somewhat handsome features had there been anyone in the immediate vicinity, but he had the room to himself, and he was aware of it, even although he was so deep in thought.

"Ronald Barron was the favourite nephew of uncle Barron, and I was—well, never very well liked!" he thought. "I always hated him, even before I was old enough to have any reason for it! Instinct, I suppose! Then we grew up and he cut me out with Jessie, rich uncle Barron's daughter, so that the money went to him at the old boy's death, instead of coming to me, as it ought to have done. I am the son of his sister, the oldest of the family." He did not stop to explain why such a kinship should give him priority. "And he had the chance of going on, while my business has——"

He stopped, and an ugly smile crossed his face.

"That is, it would probably have failed long ago if I had not been 'cute enough to contrive certain devices that most people would call 'shady' and 'very risky'! They *are* risky, that's a fact, and if I could find out how to combine revenge with profit, that would be very pleasant."

For half an hour he sat in meditation, his face gradually assuming a set expression. He arose abruptly, muttered "I'll do it!" and went out into the street.

Ronald Barron, the object of his meditations, was hard at work in his factory, situated in a rural district just out of town. The district was a favourable one for factories, and other firms had established their works in the locality. Ground was cheap, labour also fairly cheap and plentiful, while it had the further advantage of being near a small river and a main railway line, thus securing moderate charges for the transport of goods. Quite next to his factory, as a matter of fact, stood that of Walter Menzies and Co.; only a few yards of ground separated the boundaries of the two.

Ronald Barron had his coat off, and his hands were dirty with steel filings and oil; he was assisting his engineer in the setting up of a machine which was as dear to him as a child. It was his own invention; he had worked on the idea for years, but had met with many failures. If it succeeded, it would revolutionise many industries. He had nearly attained success, a little alteration, here and there, would settle the matter, he felt certain; so he and the engineer had been working energetically at it all the day. About half an hour before the time for stopping work for the day, the machine was set running, but after a few revolutions one of the smaller working parts broke. It was one of those minor accidents that always happen in experimental work, but it was disappointing.

"We must make that of steel," said Barron decisively. "But that must be left till to-morrow; we are tired now. You can do it before dinner, and we can get it running again, so that we shall be ready for the visit of the gentleman who intends to float the invention for me. I think it will go at last!"

Barron had a house about two miles from his factory, and to this he returned, tired but very hopeful.

"It is the dream of my life, Jessie dear!" he cried, when he had finished telling her all about the day's work. "And it will help up our fallen fortunes. Uncle Barron's fortune was rather a visionary one, for those speculations of his turned out to be unsound, and the securities were worth little more than the paper they were engraved on."

Jessie sighed.

"Still, we have been happy here," she said, brightening, "and that is the great thing. But you are not eating; I cannot allow you to become so absorbed in your invention, and you must try to throw it off when you are at home."

But Ronald could not rest, and about nine o'clock he went out on the pretext of having a walk before retiring. A slight alteration of a working part had occurred to him, and he thought he would go to the factory and look at the part in question. He smiled as he struck across the fields; the watchman never knew when his employer might enter the premises.

He walked almost to the gate of the factory and then stopped. It was rather too bad to deceive Jessie; she would be expecting him back, but if he once got at that machine it might be one o'clock in the morning before he returned! No, it was not fair to her, and he would go home at once! He swung round on his heel and retraced his steps. He stopped a few yards off, just to take out his silver match-box and relight his cigar, after which he stepped out briskly.

The evening papers of the following day contained an

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account of a disastrous fire which had gutted the premises of Messrs. R. Barron and Co. and the adjacent buildings of Messrs. Walter Menzies and Co. The premises of Barron and Co. were a total wreck; the fire had, it seemed, originated there, and the sparks had been blown to the buildings of Menzies and Co., destroying them.

To the public it was merely a fire, after all; but to Ronald it meant something far worse. All the patterns made for his invention had been destroyed, as well as the machine itself, and that meant months of waiting. His ordinary business would suffer considerably through his inability to deliver orders, which would go to rival firms. The place was well insured, rather over-insured, in fact, but he had not insured to any extent against loss of trade. But the greatest misfortune, in his opinion, was the destruction of the patterns and the machine.

There was one rather startling feature in connection with the fire; the remains of the watchman could not be traced. He had not been seen, and the conclusion was that he had been asleep and had perished, but a search revealed no traces of him. Had he set fire to the place and absconded?

Naturally, some slight suspicion fell on Barron, but it was not entertained for long. He was known to be a man of integrity, and he had been so terribly cut up by the loss.

"He was like a raving madman while it was blazing!" declared a spectator. "Rushed out half dressed and nearly caught his death o' cold. Would he do that if he had set it afire hisself? Acting?" He glared at the workman who ventured this remark; it was an employé of Menzies and Co. "Don't be an ijiot, man! He'd make his fortune if he could act like that!"

That was the general opinion; but the question remained: What of the watchman? It was finally conjectured that he had been smoking, that the place had caught fire through his carelessness, and that he had fled to avoid consequences. Part of the insurance money was paid to enable Barron to begin rebuilding, pending the settlement of the actual amount of the claim, and the matter began to lose interest.

It was nearly a month after the disastrous fire, when, one evening Menzies found himself in the smoking room of the same hotel at which we first became acquainted with him. The past month had not been particularly happy with him, judging by his countenance.

"There seems to be some sort of a cherub, above or below, who takes care of certain people!" he growled to himself. "I thought that fire would have crippled Barron for good; yet——" He muttered an anathema. "Yet here he is again, on top. He gets a good sum out of the insurance, and there is a boom in mining shares that must have bounced his apparently worthless securities to a high figure!" And again the anethema.

"I must certainly say that the fire was a good thing for me," continued Menzies, with a sardonic grin, which quickly gave place to a compression of the lips surmounted by a scowl. "But my ill-luck follows me. Bad luck on horses, bad luck at cards—everywhere! I can't rebuild, so I shall sell the freehold land and the goodwill of the business. But Ronald—"

A customer entered and sat down near him; he began to read the paper, but was startled by the oath that presently came in a violent tone from the lips of Menzies.

"You will permit me to remark that such language is not seemly in a public place," he observed mildly. He was conscious afterwards that his words lent themselves to the interpretation that the oath would have been quite seemly in private, which was not what he meant. "I think that an apology is due to me for——"

Menzies interrupted him with another outburst that froze the sentence on his lips, and he did not recover till Menzies had walked out with long strides.

Ronald Barron and his sweet wife were the objects of these outbursts, but the mild-mannered customer did not know that, and would have been no wiser if he had known it. Menzies strode along in the cool breeze, his heart full of venom against the two and his brain busy with schemes for injuring them. Suddenly he pulled himself up and uttered an exclamation.

"It's the very idea! Why did I not think of it before?"

He lost no time in carrying out the idea, for he was at Cambrian House, the home of Ronald Barron, early next day. The visit was not a welcome one to either Ronald or Jessie, and, as the message was that the business was private Jessie made no effort to see Menzies, who was conducted straight to Ronald's study. The greeting was frigid.

"We have both been the victims of a fire," commenced Menzies, as soon as he was seated. "It has been very unfortunate for me and I'm comparatively hard up."

"It was unfortunate for me also!" said Ronald, resenting the remark and the tone in which it was uttered.

Menzies smiled meaningly.

"Strange about the watchman, wasn't it?" he asked sarcastically. "It paid him to keep out of the way. I mean, somebody paid him to keep out of the way!"

"What do you mean?" inquired Ronald, turning pale with anger and a vague dread. He guessed the object of Menzies' words. "Do you mean to insinuate——"

"I insinuate nothing; I can prove what I am about to say!" was the prompt response. "Sit still"—as Ronald jumped from his chair with clenched hands—"*that* won't help you! Listen! On the night of the fire you lost your silver match-box."

"Yes," assented Ronald in surprise, resuming his seat.

"Exactly! I found it only a few yards from your factory. I saw you leave your factory; you had the box in your hand, and you dropped it in your agitation!"

"You lie!" gasped Ronald.

"Of course, I quite understand that you were hard pushed just then, and that your boasted invention was a failure. You made the last run of it that very evening, and it failed. It was convenient to say that one of the working parts had not been made strong enough, but *that* would have made no difference. The man who had advanced money to pull the thing through, under the belief that he had a good speculation, or something to float a company on and make a pile before people found out its worthlessness, that man was coming to see it working—he wouldn't wait any longer. Something had to be done to cover the fiasco, and that something was done!"

Ronald could not speak; he listened like one in a dream. It was true that he had been financed, that was the only grain of truth in the story; yet he began to see how the unjust suspicion of four weeks ago could be elaborated and worked on.

"It was necessary to find a scapegoat," pursued Menzies, "and Jackson served the purpose—for a consideration, no doubt! You've got to do something when you have been 'having' a man to that extent! So old Jackson was supposed to have a sly whiff at night and set fire to the place! It doesn't seem to have occurred to anyone that the taciturn old misanthrope never did smoke! Did ever anyone see him smoking during the day? Never! He had two teeth out in front, in both top and bottom row, and couldn't hold a pipe! But the flaw in the thing was—his body couldn't be found!"

"It may still be beneath some ruins," ventured Ronald weakly. He felt crushed under the weight of the coming calamity; how could he disprove it? It is always so hard to disprove, and people are so ready to be uncharitable.

"The finding of the matchbox gives you away! Further, I saw you, for you passed close to me just as you dropped the box. You cannot deny that you were out."

"I did not enter the factory!"

"I saw you go in!" lied Menzies boldly—so boldly that Barron wondered whether, in his abstraction, he really had entered the factory without being conscious of the fact.

"Why did you not say all this to the public at the time?" asked Ronald.

"Because I did not wish to give you away, my dear cousin! Besides, these little matters can be arranged in a manner pro-

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fitable to both sides. You don't want it to be known, and I want money, see? *On peut s'arranger!* That is all the French I can remember, and I have never forgotten that because it puts the thing so neatly. It can be arranged!"

"You want money?" asked Ronald angrily. "Money, as the price of your silence. Never! Do your worst! Get out of this place before I have——"

"Not so fast!" interrupted Menzies coolly. "Just think what it means. Disgrace and imprisonment; think what that will be to your wife, *who may herself be brought into it!* She knew that you went out. Think it over till to-morrow. I'll come again." And he went out.

Ronald sank down in despair. Jessie soon rejoined him, for she feared evil, and her heart seemed to cease beating as Ronald told her the object of Menzies' visit.

"He cannot do it!" cried Jessie, with dry lips. "It is too wicked to be permitted by Providence. Cheer up, Ronald dear; we shall find a way out, but we must not yield!"

"It may be best," argued Ronald, who saw only the uncharitable world. "We have money now——"

"You are distraught, dear," she said tenderly, kissing him. "You must forget it. You are not yourself, for my Ronald would not talk so weakly. We will stand against it, whatever comes!" She uttered the words proudly, head erect.

Away in a hospital in the centre of the metropolis, a man was sitting up in the accident ward. He had been brought in by some bargemen, who stated that they had fished him out of the river, miles away, and it was concluded that he had been knocked about by some roughs and thrown into the little river, which was not wider than a canal. The man had recovered consciousness while on the barge, and, on being asked if he had been maltreated, had answered in the affirmative. The bargemen had brought him to a point where a tram made it easy for him to be conveyed to the hospital. Not often that a tram has such a passenger, but it was an early morning car, with a few market men inside, and the incident did not arouse so much attention.

"Shall I get over it?" asked the injured man feebly, when enquiry was made concerning his name, and he refused to say more till he heard the verdict. "My name's Smithers, then," he said, on learning that he might pull through.

It was a wonder that such a jumbled-up piece of humanity could ever be got whole again; he had broken ribs, broken head, and torn face; he was a mass of plaster and bandages; but he was made of good strong stuff and he began to mend.

"Don't remember anything about it, 'cept that I was attacked," he replied to questions, and the questioners could get no more information out of him. He would only grin and as he had five teeth out in front—four old vacancies one fresh—he was not a pretty object when he grinned, so, they ceased their interrogations.

There were some old illustrated papers in the ward, and one of them, about a fortnight out of date, came into his hands when he was able to sit up and read a little with eyes that peeped from between layers of court plaster. He saw an illustration of a fire at a factory, and read an account of it; the report contained an allusion to the suspicion that the owner had set it on fire. That newspaper report appeared to interest and amuse him immensely; he chuckled in a blood-curdling fashion, and the nurse became alarmed lest he had a fit. He hugged that paper and would not let go, so they humoured him, and allowed him to retain it.

In rather more than a week after that he announced his intention of going out. He had made marvellous progress all along, but since the reading of that report his progress had been even more rapid. The doctor demurred, but Smithers insisted that he must go.

"It's a sudden decision, doctor, but a sudden thought has come over me and I want your help to get out. I'm tired of this, and my bones will heal as well outside as in."

They wanted beds just then, so they decided to let him go. An advance was made to enable him to get to his destination, and, by special favour, an attendant was sent with him. He took the train at Liverpool Street Station for a populous suburb.

When Menzies arrived at Cambrian House, as arranged, the next afternoon, he was shown into the study and left to himself. There was a screen in the corner of the room; it was occasionally used in front of the door, but was this time arranged in the corner. Ronald entered a moment later.

"Well?" interrogated Menzies.

"I will listen to none of your vile suggestions!" said Ronald firmly. He was ashamed of his passing weakness. "I have nothing to fear. Do your worst!"

"Highty-toighty!" said Menzies, nettled. "You had better listen to reason!"

"And I'm thinking you'd better listen to Jackson, Mr. Menzies!" came a voice from behind the screen.

The screen was pushed over, and Menzies saw Jackson sitting in the corner, his scarred face expanded in a grin that showed the five vacancies in the rows of teeth.

"Surprised to see me, ain't ye? I like to give my friends a surprise. Well, your game's up! And it's no good trying to run, ayther, for the tecs are about!"

Baffled, foiled in his attempt to blackmail, and confronted by a witness of his guilt, Menzies looked about with a view of escaping, but he saw Ronald guarding the door and a man outside the window. He saw that the game was up, as Jackson had said, and he coolly sat down again.

"You've got the trump card, and I give in!" he observed quietly. "I should like to hear how you escaped, you old fossil, while I'm waiting."

"You're pretty cool, Mr. Menzies, and I admire ye for it," responded Jackson. "But it was playing it low down to attack an old fellow like me."

"So it was, and I'm sorry."

"I'll bet you are, *now!*" said Jackson, grinning. "Well, it won't take long. When I came across ye setting fire to shavings and things in our factory, I saw that the place had got hold, I tried to chase ye, and pull the bell on my way, to give the alarm, but you caught at me and we struggled. You cut me about, but I threw you off, and then you ran and I went after ye, for the place was well alight and I knew ye must have set it afire in three or four places, following me as I went me rounds, and doing the trick."

Jackson had to stop for lack of breath, but he soon recovered.

"I caught ye up some way off, and then you hit at me with a stick. *That* is what I complain of. You ought to have fought fair, with your fists. I stuck to ye, but ye knocked me about and then you must have dragged me bumping over the ground, breaking me ribs, and then ye must have put me into a boat or a cart—I can't tell, because ye had wacked the senses out of me—till ye got me a long way down the river, then you dropped me in.

"By that time I was coming round a bit, and the cold water revived me. I was in luck, for a barge came and picked me up. And that's all ye need know. I kept my name quite mum, because I didn't want ye to think I was alive, for I meant to scare ye some day. I was in luck agin, for I was taken so far away from the factory that nobody thought I was the missing man. And luck was with me agin this morning when I had a sudden inspiration that I ought to get to Mr. Barron; that helped me to spoil your game here."

"Very good! I am ready for the detective, my dear cousin. I suppose I shall make two or three more public appearances and then I shall retire for a while!"

In which forecast he was perfectly correct.

John Smythe.

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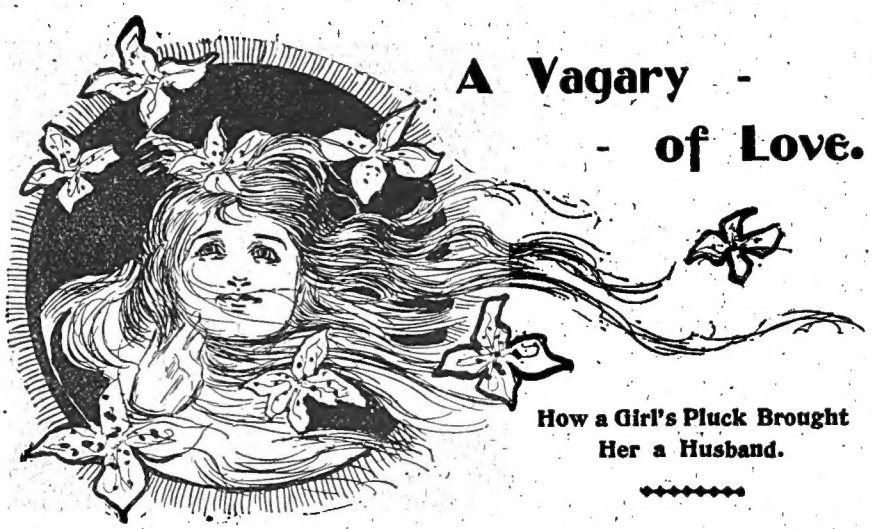

A Vagary of Love.

How a Girl's Pluck Brought Her a Husband.

It was Alice Mynders' wedding eve.

The bride stood in her room fully dressed and waiting for the summons from the groom. She wore a dark woollen gown, and a waterproof cloak with the hood thrown back was drawn over her shoulders. The remainder of her trousseau was in a small leather bag, which stood on a chair near the window.

Alice Mynders had often looked forward to her wedding day, but she never imagined it would be like this.

In place of the village church, aglow with sunlight, decked with flowers and filled with an eager, admiring throng, as Alice had so often pictured it, when she should walk up the aisle leaning on her father's arm, the girl looked out upon a sky black with hurrying clouds and filled with the mutter of thunder.

No bridesmaid was to attend her, although her younger sister, Penelope, nervous and watchful, stood beside her. Instead of the crowd of expectant youths and maidens, her marriage would be unwitnessed except by the household of some country minister, of whose very name she was ignorant.

It will thus be seen that the marriage was to be a runaway one. The girls were waiting for the coming of Jack Rookley, who was to arrive at 10 o'clock with a horse and light cart and take Alice away.

"I'm sure it must be 10 now," said Alice, anxiously. Penelope crossed the room to where the clock stood. She had to peer closely at its face to tell the hour, for the lamp was turned down low.

"No; it needs fifteen minutes yet," she said.

"I feel just as though something would happen," said Alice. "Father was in a bad humour to-night. It seemed almost as though he suspected something. Did you notice how he looked at me?"

"No, no, Ally, that was your imagination. You must be brave now and not let anything happen to disappoint Jack again. This is the third time, you know."

"But to climb down a ladder into that awful darkness! I don't see how I can ever do it. It's a good deal to ask of a girl," said Alice fretfully.

"Not if you love the man," said Penelope warmly, "and I know you do, Sis. You'd do more than that for Jack, wouldn't you?" she added persuasively.

"I don't see why father and he can't agree," said Alice in the same tone of irritation, "and, oh, why doesn't he come?"

The sisters sat in silence for some minutes. Presently they were startled by a tightly-rolled ball of paper flying through the window and falling on the floor with a light thud. It was the signal agreed upon. The girls sprang up, and, after what seemed a long interval of waiting, the end of a ladder obtruded itself slowly from the darkness. It wavered a little and then rested securely against the window sill.

"Come, Ally, courage," whispered Penelope. "I will hold it fast here, and Jack is doing the same thing below. You can't possibly fall."

Alice stepped upon the chair by the window and caught hold of the ladder. "My bag," she cried in a dismayed whisper. "I can never carry it down there!"

"Never mind," whispered Penelope. "I'll throw it after you, or if that would make too much noise, I'll bring it down Now, have you got hold o the ladder? Wait a moment." Penelope turned the light out leaving the room in tota darkness.

"I can't see anything, Penelope. I'm afraid."

"Oh, do go on, dear sister, I beg of you," urged Penelope. "See, here is my hand, hold it till you get started; the ladder is perfectly secure."

Alice stepped upon the sill and caught hold of the ladder. She was trembling nervously. A long roll of thunder caused her to utter a faint scream and jump back into the room.

"I can't do it—there's no use saying any more about it," she murmured hysterically, "it's too much for me."

Penelope stood a moment as though turned to stone. The ladder, agitated from below, scraped against the sill with a slight noise. "Alice do you mean that you are not going with Jack?"

"Yes, I do."

"But what is to be done?"

"Go down to him yourself if you want to, tell him he must think of something else, or he needn't think at all. I'm tired of being worried!" she exclaimed desperately. "I don't believe I care for him as I did, anyhow."

At this moment the rain which had been impending began to fall. Penelope caught her sister's waterproof from her shoulders and hastily put it on, drawing the hood over her head. She stepped lightly upon the sill, and grasping the ladder firmly, began to descend without hesitation.

As her foot touched the ground her arm was grasped by a strong hand, and Jack Rookley, placing his lips close to her ear whispered, "Don't speak—I just heard a shutter open."

Penelope hurried along by Jack's side towards the gate opening into the lane, where she knew a horse and cart stood waiting. She intended to explain as soon as they got out of earshot of the house.

"Listen a moment, Jack," she whispered at length, "I must tell you——"

"Hush, wait till we are safely off," he replied, "and then——"

At this moment a loud, harsh voice rang out of the darkness, coming apparently from a lower window. "Who's there?" it cried.

Penelope's heart seemed to jump into her throat and almost suffocate her. The voice was her father's.

Jack seized her arm and with great, rapid strides hurried her out into the lane. She went with him willingly, her one thought being to get him away. As they reached the cart Jack caught the girl about the waist and almost threw her in.

"Jack, I must not go," she tried to say, her lips forming words which came without audible sound. The young man leapt in after her and gave the rein to his mare. Again the raucous voice sounded, this time from the yard near the gate. "Stop, there, or I'll fire."

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Penelope thought he would do it. Jack half stood up and seized the whip to lash the mare. The girl sprang behind him, and, covering his body with hers, stretched out her arms.

Instantly the report of a gun rang out, and the shot whistled through the top of the cart close to their heads. Stifling an imprecation, Jack seized Penelope with his right hand and forced her back in the seat. Now they were dashing up the road, and a second shot from the old man's gun fell wide.

A flash of lightning revealed the girl's face to the young man.

"Penelope!" he cried in amazement.

"Yes, it's Penelope," she answered calmly.

"Where is Alice?"

"She couldn't come."

"Why not?"

"She was afraid to come down the ladder."

"But you—why did you come?"

"To warn you—I did not have time on account of father."

There was a moment's silence, broken only by the flying of the horse.

"She was afraid to come down the ladder to marry me," said Jack slowly. "You weren't afraid to come down to tell me she wasn't going to keep her word. Just now you jumped between me and your father's gunshot. Why did you do that?"

Penelope's heart leapt, but still she said nothing.

"Well, I've done with her now."

"No, no, Jack, don't say that."

"Yes, I do say it. This is the third time she's tricked me. There was the time she went to Stanton on a visit to her cousin; she went back on me then after promising. Then there was the time when I had a chance to go into business for myself. She agreed to go with me then and didn't keep her word. No, she simply doesn't care anything about me."

"Have patience with her, Jack, until a better opportunity offers. Remember what an awful night it is."

"The night wasn't too awful for you to come out in. I tell you, you're a game girl, Penelope, as game as they make 'em. I can't ever forget what you've done to-night."

They drove on in silence for some minutes.

"I'll never forget you, Penelope," he repeated, reflectively. "Never."

Penelope's lips were trembling again, but she tried to speak calmly.

"You must set me down now, Jack, and let me go home. I know every step of the road, and I'll not be afraid."

"Let you walk home in this rain and face that murderous old man alone—forgive me, Penelope, dear—but do you take me for a coward?"

"But what are we to do, Jack?"

"I'll tell you presently; let me think a moment. What message did Alice send me to-night?"

"Why, that she couldn't do it."

"There was something else?"

"Well, she said you must think of another way?"

"Didn't she say anything about her feelings towards me not being the same?"

"Jack, you mustn't push me that way; it isn't fair to Alice—she's not herself to-night."

"All right, my girl. Now let me speak a moment. Sometimes things happen in a few minutes the like of which don't happen in half a lifetime. One of those things has happened to-night. I've found out what a brave, splendid girl you are, and I've found out, too, that I love you. Penelope, something tells me that you love me. Do you?"

"Jack, you've said I was a brave girl, but remember I can't stand too much. You shouldn't talk to me like that. Remember Alice."

"Penelope, I'll never marry Alice now, and neither does she want to marry me. I'm sure she told you so to-night. It must be you or no other girl in the world."

The tired mare had by this time dropped into a slow trot.

"Listen, Jack!" cried the girl in sudden alarm. Behind them in the distance they heard the beat of a galloping horse's hoofs. "It's father—I know it is! Oh, what shall we do?"

Jack whipped up the mare and a few yards further on he turned into a narrow road which branched off from the highway. Once here he allowed the mare to walk. In the soft mire of the country road the wheels made no sound.

"He's sure to keep on to the bridge unless he sees us. Heaven send there may be no lightning now," whispered Jack.

"Penelope," he said after a moment, "if he catches us and he wants to kill me, he must; I can't fire on your father; but in this last minute that we may have together I want you to tell me that you love me."

Penelope hesitated a moment. The flying hoofs were coming nearer. Why should she deny herself this moment of happiness? She placed her hands upon his shoulders and put her cheek close to his. "I love you, Jack," she whispered.

The young man caught her in his arms. "God bless you for that, my dear girl," he said; "you have sacrificed your life for me to-night, and you are ready to sacrifice your happiness for your sister, but you shan't do it. Penelope—we'll be happy together yet."

Jack brought the mare to a dead stand. Nearer and nearer came old Farmer Mynders. They could hear his deep imprecations as he urged his horse forward, and the heavy breathing of the animal itself as it galloped wildly on.

He passed the turning and sped on towards the bridge. The sound of the hoofs died away and then Jack said:

"We've escaped that; now we must keep on this road, I daren't go by the highways for fear we'll meet him coming

She stepped lightly on to the sill, and, grasping the ladder firmly, began to descend.

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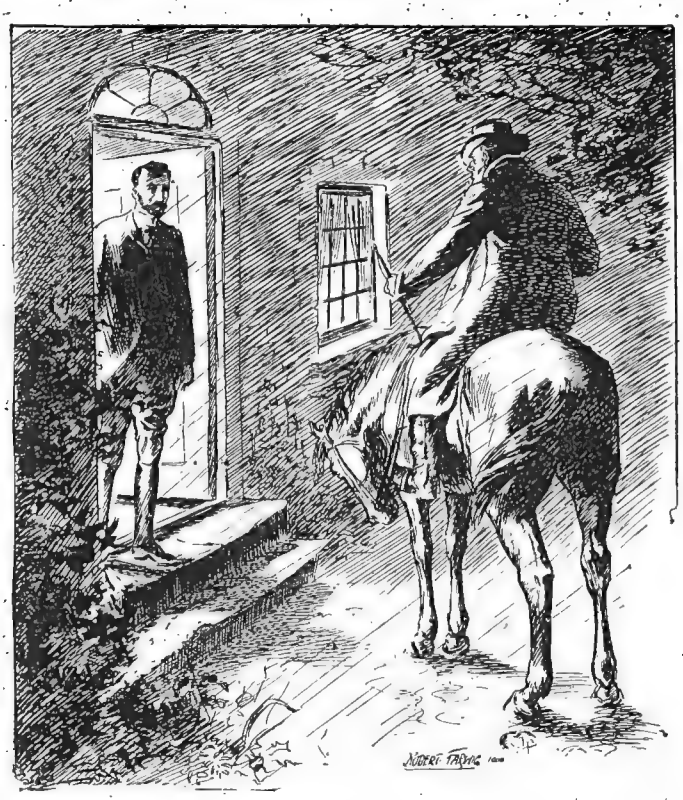

"Ha! Joliffe," came from the road, "is my daughter Alice in your house?"

back. My plan was first to be married, and then to go to Tom Joliffe's. I'd arranged it with Tom and the family to wait up for us."

Penelope noticed that he spoke of his plans as though she had been included in them from the first.

"But, Jack," she pleaded, "remember that things are changed."

"I do remember, darling," he said, slipping his arm round her shoulder, "nothing shall be done without your consent. We are going straight to Tom's now. This road will bring us out at his house. Put your dear head on my shoulder, you must be weary after all you've gone through, and listen to what I have thought of."

For the next half-hour, while the mare plodded slowly on through the darkness and the rain, Jack talked, and as Penelope listened, Alice, her father and her former sense of what was her duty slipped far back into the night and she saw only the new happiness that had come to her.

"Let it be as you wish, Jack, if you think it is right," she said when he had finished. "I would not wrong Alice, but you say you don't love her, and after all she sent me down to you—yes, I'll do it, Jack, I'll marry you."

A feeling of supreme lassitude after the peril of the past hour pervaded her being. She suffered her head to lie upon his shoulder, abandoning herself to her fatigue and her sense of perfect security with him.

And now a light came into view from the gable of Tom Joliffe's house. Penelope drew close to Jack as they drove under the dripping apple trees in Tom's yard, greeted by the baying of the watch dogs.

"What will they say, Jack?" she whispered, her cheeks burning in the darkness

"Leave it all to me, sweetheart," he answered.

The excitement of their arrival and the explanations Jack's altered plans had called forth, had nearly subsided in Tom Joliffe's household. Tom's wife had taken Penelope under her wing and Jack and Tom were sitting before the open fire. The mare had been put in the stable, the soaking garments of the young man were almost dry and his story was finished.

Suddenly a shout came from the roadway in front of the house.

"It's Mynders," said Jack, starting to his feet. "Let me go to the door."

"I'll go myself," said Joliffe, rising in his turn. "No, man," as Jack took a step forward, "this is my house; I'll do as I please in it. If I want you I'll call you."

He forced the young man back in his chair and in a moment more Rookley heard the rattle of the key in the lock and the front door opened.

"Ha! Joliffe," came from the road, "is my daughter Alice in your house?"

"Your daughter Alice," echoed Joliffe in a surprised voice, "no, I haven't seen her."

"She left my house to-night with a man I've forbidden her to keep company with. I'm afraid I'm too late and they're married by now."

"Are you sure there's no mistake, Mynders, and that Alice isn't safe at home?"

"No, there's no mistake. She left by the window and he had a horse waitin'. That girl was the apple of my eye, Joliffe."

Jack's heart smote him, for the old man's voice broke on the last words. Then he heard Joliffe say: "I'm sorry, Mynders, but Alice is not here."

"Well, I must look elsewhere, then; good-night."

The tired horse jogged onward and Joliffe closed the door.

It was almost daybreak when Farmer Mynders, weary and discouraged, reached his home. He went at once to bed, and it was some time after 8 o'clock when the maid of all work awakened him with a letter that had been brought by a messenger. His new sorrow weighed heavily upon him as he broke the seal. He was astonished to find a few lines from his younger daughter begging forgiveness of her father and her dear sister for what she had done.

"You have only to send for us, father, and you will find that you have not lost a daughter, but have gained a son," the letter ended. It was signed Penelope Rookley. The old man sprang into his clothes and rushed into the hall, where he almost knocked over Alice, who was waiting in fear and trembling. He clasped her to his arms in a frenzy of delight.

"Why didn't the young jackanapes say it was Penelope he wanted," he cried, as soon as he could speak; "why did you all keep it from me? He could have had her and welcome!"

"I couldn't leave you, father," sobbed Alice. "I couldn't go against your wishes, and so I gave him to 'Pen.'" Perhaps at the moment she believed she had done so. Certainly her father did not doubt the truth of the statement, then or ever.

The reconciliation which followed was complete. Farmer Mynders was willing to forgive anybody anything so long as he was able to keep his favourite daughter and he soon grew to like and admire Penelope's husband.

Whatever chagrin Miss Mynders might have felt at her lover's slipping his bonds so easily, she was discreet enough to show none. After the first whispered and oft-interrupted interview between Penelope and herself at the family reunion, the matter was never again referred to between them.

When the Joliffes, big with importance, let fall hints of their knowledge of the true history of Penelope's marriage, Alice was wont to say "We all agreed that Penelope was much better suited to be Jack's wife than I." And Mr. and Mrs. John Rookley were so pleased at having one another that they never contradicted her.

F. Livingston.

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A WOMAN'S REVENGE.

By E. M. GILMER.

HE was very young and he held desperate views of life, born of boundless ignorance and inexperience. She was a woman, no longer in her first youth, but with that about her that made the mere pink and white prettiness of girlhood seem as insipid as bread and butter. In every line of her lissom figure, in every fold of her thin black dinner gown, in the very air with which she turned to the callow youth at her side, there was all of the fascination of the woman of the world—the woman who is sophisticated, who knows life.

She had, in truth, rather shrugged her shoulders when her hostess had told young Grigsby to take her in to dinner, but—the lad was amusing her. He was a newspaper reporter. He talked shop, and she liked people who talked shop. It showed you the underside of things, and how the wheels go round. Just now the boy had been giving her the history of the latest murder sensation. A man, an Italian, who kept a flower stall, had been found dead with a knife thrust through his heart, and his face buried among the roses. There was no evidence of any struggle. The man had no enemies so far as was known. Not a penny of money had been taken. There was absolutely no clue either to the murderer or to a motive for the deed.

"Depend on it," said the youth with all the self-confidence of the amateur detective, "a woman did it. The man was a handsome fellow, and he had just been married. Behind it all you will see that there is some black-eyed Beatrice, or Tessa, he had made love to and then forgotten. The old story, you know—the woman scorned. It's the kind of a thing a woman always revenges."

"Oh, not always, surely," the woman replied, with the flicker of a smile, "murders are so unpleasant, and——"

"Different stratas of society, different methods," the boy interrupted. "In her set the woman scorned takes her revenge with a knife. In ours she takes it—God knows how." There was a pause, then the woman spoke.

"Perhaps you are right," she said; "each of us revenges our own wrongs and slights—our hurt hearts and our wounded pride—in our own way. Curiously enough, I have just been watching a little drama, a comedy or tragedy, as you like, that proves your point—with a difference.

"Shall I tell you the story? Yes? It begins back in the dark ages—oh, fifteen years ago, and, as a dramatist would say, both scenes occur at the same summer resort. The heroine was a—a—friend of mine, and at that time she was a mere slip of a girl. Picture to yourself a thin, childish figure, with a mop of red brown hair and great intense eyes that always seemed too big for the wistful little face. Think of her as one utterly ignorant of all the world's ways, but with a hungry, passionate little soul, yearning for love, for music, for beauty, for a wider horizon, for all that goes to make up the salt and savour of life.

"It happened that that summer an old aunt had taken the girl to a health resort, and chance threw her with a man of the world, cultured, brilliant, travelled, so unlike the men she had ever known in her crude life he seemed to her the very god of her dreams. There was not a charm of his polished manners, not a turn of his quick wit, not an elegance or luxury of his toilet that did not thrill her every sense of delight. What he saw in her, Heaven knows. Perhaps in some dim way her soul called to his, and for some time he answered it.

"It's a platitude, isn't it," went on the woman with a throb of pity in her voice, "to say that the girl fell in love with him? What chance has the little helpless, fluttering bird against the serpent that ensnares it? To the girl it was like the coming true of all that she had ever hoped or dreamt. He fed her alert brain as well as her heart. He talked to her of books, he described for her the strange places of the earth where he had travelled, he pictured to her the great singers and actors he had heard, and she choked with the tense emotion of that moment when the artist holds the house spellbound, before the tumultuous applause. Her sympathy and her understanding were like a strung harp that only needed his touch to wake into music, and so he taught her love. Then, suddenly, one night he stooped and kissed her—and it was no longer a child, but a woman who looked up in his eyes with an awakened soul.

"In a few days he went away. The summer was ended. He had amused himself teaching the little girl how to love, but he had tired of the game, and he threw her aside as a child does a toy it has wearied of and broken. As for the girl, she had her bad quarter of an hour in which she learnt many things. She learnt to cover up a breaking heart with a smile, and to laugh to keep from weeping. She learnt the shame that scorches a woman's soul when she gives her love unsought, and when she had learnt her lesson, she knew that all her innocent, girlish trust and faith was dead, and that come who might in life she would have nothing but the lees of her love to give him. She had offered the brimming cup to another, and he had quaffed it, and thrown it carelessly aside.

"You are not to think the man was bad," went on the woman, "he was merely careless. He had amused himself with the girl, and it was her misfortune that she was too young and too ignorant to understand the game, and so got hurt. But time brings strange revenges. While the girl was still young enough to profit by it the old aunt died, and left her a fortune. She went abroad, travelled, studied, knew many, many people in many lands, and was no more the little ignorant country girl, but a personage. People don't grieve always over a lost love, you know, but still underneath everything else in her heart was the smart of the old wound—the shame of her scorned love.

"They never met again until this summer, and curiously enough it was at the same summer resort. Life had brought its disappointments to the man, too. He was ill, broken in health and fortune. He had married a woman, beautiful, selfish, pleasure-loving, who bitterly resented their loss of wealth, and who had abandoned him in his misfortunes. The girl—she was a woman now—saw all this, and she smiled a little bitterly to think how Fate played into her hands. The man was sick, lonely, heart hungry. Her revenge would be so easy to take. It was all there, deeper, more complete than she could have imagined."

"And I bet she jolly well paid him back," put in the boy.

"No," said the woman a little wistfully, "it came to her that revenge was a bitter drink, after all. She found out—it does not matter how—that a certain sum of money would enable him to tide over a crisis in his affairs, and perhaps regain his fortune, and secretly, so he might never know, she supplied it to him. Relieved of anxiety he grew better at once, but through the long days of convalescence the woman lingered near him, breathing into him fresh hope, and then——"

"And then?" asked the boy curiously.

"And then," repeated the woman dully, "she went away. She had taken her revenge, and the man never knew that the woman who loved him had saved him for the woman he loved."

The hostess was gathering up the ladies with her eyes, and in a moment more they had passed through the broad doorway. When they had gone the boy sat staring at his wineglass.

"Well, I am hanged!" he said.

"Eight years ago!" murmured Allan Blair, as he shut down the lid and locked the box. "Well," he continued sheepishly, catching sight of his slightly flushed cheeks in the looking-glass opposite, "it did us good that meeting in the Scottish wilds, but—but I thought I had got over it long ago!"

He threw himself back in a chair and lived that time over again in imagination.

He was twenty-five at that time; a Scotsman who had never set foot across the border! He was born in the South of England and had been educated there; he had taken part in the management of the firm of which his father was chief, and had worked steadily for four years—and all that without once getting to the north of the Tweed. He felt ashamed of himself when he remembered the fact suddenly one summer; it came like a revelation to him. He cancelled his arrangements for a tour in Switzerland then and there and stated his intention of going north; hence it came about that he found himself spending his short holiday alone in Auld Reekie.

He had passed through Inverness and was amusing himself in the neighbourhood of Beauly. Having left his things at a hotel he had wandered near the mansion called Eskadale, and away through scenery that charmed his peculiar disposition beyond measure. Tired with the work of ascending one of the eminences, he was about to sit down when, on turning at the sound of splashing water, he beheld a vision that astonished him for several seconds.

In the midst of a small torrent was a piece of rock, and on this was seated a woman of surpassing beauty, tossing the water aside with her bare feet and enjoying the occupation and the surroundings with langourous pleasure.

Allan stared at her in a manner which he afterwards felt to have been rude. She was no blithe, bonnie Scottish maiden, accustomed only to the freedom of that wild spot; he could see that her dress was one of considerable richness, such as would be worn only by a woman used to dressing well, and almost out of place in that spot. Before he had time to notice more, she had turned her face towards him and saluted him with a graceful wave of the hand.

"It is very pleasant here!" she cried, smiling sweetly. "Would you like to come? See, there is room enough for two on this rock."

"How did you get there?" he asked, in wonderment, not so much as to how she had reached the rock as in perplexity as to *why* she was there. It was so strange, so unconventional.

"Oh, that is easy enough!" she replied, the languid smile still hovering about her lips. "Take off your boots and socks, walk out as far as you can on that plank there, then jump. It's quite easy!"

It was perfectly easy, and Allan Blair did as he was bidden without stopping to reflect on the ludicrousness of the situation. In two minutes he was seated by her side.

She was beautiful, with an indolent yet soul-stirring beauty. The pallid face, so clear and so finely carved, the rosy-red lips, through which the pearly teeth could be observed when she smiled, the lovely hair that seemed to flow from her forehead, and was so arranged that it was impossible to tell whether it had a beginning and an ending, or not, and the eyes! Cat's eyes, Allan Blair called them, and caught himself wondering whether they shone in the dark; they were covered with long lashes, and Allan felt himself stirred to his inmost being when they were fixed full on him.

"How beautiful!" murmured Allan, half aloud.

"I do not care for scenery," she said, mistaking his meaning. "It is all the same; there is a slight difference in the colouring, or in the kind of tree and the position, and the sky is of a different hue, but there are only trees, water, sky, grass, rock, wherever one goes. What is all that?"

"You have travelled?" inquired Allan, perplexed, yet charmed. He was drinking in all the details of this beauty, which appealed to him more strongly by its langour and the indifference of the woman.

"I am constantly travelling. I know the Continent well. I travelled with my husband, but since his death I have travelled with a trusted servant, a Spaniard, who acts as courier for me. Oh, no!" she added protestingly, as Allan's face assumed a sympathetic expression. "I cannot pretend to say that I grieve any longer; it was a foolish alliance, and he soon grew tired of me, as I did of him. His name was Wentworth—my name is Sylvia Wentworth—and he left me money enough. I shall travel from place to place till—— Tell me about yourself?"

He told her; he could have kept nothing from her, for she fascinated him without exerting the slightest effort. It was impossible to be near her without falling under the spell.

"Ha, here comes Pablo! I will make him go to the foot of this mountain—it *is* a mountain, although small compared with Mont Blanc——" She seemed too indolent to finish her thoughts. "Do you speak Spanish? No? That is a pity, as you would understand what I say to Pablo."

The appearance of Pablo was not prepossessing in any case, but when contrasted with Sylvia it was decidedly repulsive. Allan reasoned that it was not fair to judge by contrast, and tried to think that there was more in Pablo than one would imagine at first sight. He was dark, with heavy brows and a perpetual scowl; the commonest of Italian boatmen, as one sees them in a tour through their native country, compared favourably with this Spaniard. Allan marvelled that this lovely creature, of not more than twenty-four, could endure to be attended by this fellow. Pablo was about forty.

Allan expected to hear her address some orders to Pablo in an imperative tone, but she assumed a very conciliatory manner. There was a lively exchange of phrases in Spanish, after which Pablo went off with a displeased look on his dark countenance.

"Let us get on to the bank," said Mrs. Wentworth. It seemed absurd to think of her as *Mrs.* Wentworth! "We can get ready for a pic-nic. Pablo has gone for the basket."

"He did not seem pleased," observed Allan drily. "Does he travel with you everywhere?"

They had both made their way, with some show of agility, to the bank, and Sylvia dried her well-shaped feet on a lace handkerchief, after hesitatingly declining the offer of Allan's services.

"I have to treat him in a conciliatory manner sometimes," replied the girl—she was little more than a girl, it seemed to Allan. "He knows his way about so well, and I can trust him thoroughly. Yes, he always goes with me. Life," she added dreamily, "is very monotonous; it is always to-day, for of what use is it to plan for to-morrow? The days are the same. It would be a change even to be wicked, if I had any inclination towards wickedness!"

"That I am sure you have not! Wickedness and you could not associate! Beauty goes with goodness!" cried Allan Blair impulsively.

"We are so high," continued Allan, after a pause spent in

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silent admiration, "that I fancy Paradise must be something like this."

Her eyes turned to his; the motion was languid, and for a moment the orbs appeared dull, then they lit up with a fire that made it difficult for him to restrain his feelings; he longed to bend over and kiss her.

"Let us go down a little way and meet Pablo," she proposed. "It is a long way up, and I saw a splendid place for a lunch about halfway down."

She held out her hand; he assisted her to rise, and together they descended. Pablo met them at the spot mentioned by Sylvia, laid the luncheon, and left them, after another animated conversation with his mistress.

As each moment passed, Allan Blair became more deeply in love with the woman he had so strangely met. She asked him questions about himself and seemed rather sorry that he was not a member of one of the parties staying at Eskadale and the other houses within a few miles. That is, she appeared to be sorry, for her movements, her very facial expressions, were so languid that it was impossible to tell exactly what she felt.

"What is it?" Allan asked himself. "She is not cold; when I touched her hand, it sent a rush of hot blood through me, yet she appears so unmoved. Could she love?"

The meal was like a dream to him; he had no eyes for anything but Sylvia. He was glad that Pablo had gone; he would have spoilt the pleasure.

"Pablo has gone to find a lodging," she informed him, when they had packed up. "You are fortunate, Mr. Blair, in having obtained a room for the night. And you have left your valuables there? How trustful you are!"

"Oh, it is in a cottage and the people are honest enough," laughed he. "Besides, no one would ever imagine that I had left money in that bag and a ring or two. I thought it safer than carrying it with me. But surely Pablo will be able——"

"I cannot sleep *anywhere*," she replied quietly. "But I could sleep here, so I will dismiss all cares and have a siesta, with you for a guard!"

She made herself comfortable and he helped her. With her back against a mound, she reclined languorously, closed her eyes, and fell quickly into a gentle slumber.

"How innocent, how trustful, she is!" murmured Allan, with beating heart. "Life with her would be Heaven!"

He watched her, and as he gazed his soul glowed and his whole frame seemed ablaze. The hot blood rushed through his veins. He was intoxicated with love. He bent nearer. The bosom heaved and fell regularly, telling of calmness and rest. The long lashes covered the eyes. The crimson lips were slightly open. He bent over her; the madness of love was upon him. Just one kiss! It was taking a mean advantage, but he would touch those lips so lightly that the contact would not awaken her. He bent so close that his moustache touched her, and her breath came lightly against his cheek. Nearer, lips almost touching; but at that instant her eyes opened, and he started back in confusion as she asked:

"What were you about to do?"

He could not meet her eyes; he bent his head and muttered some words of apology, even while he felt inclined to risk all and take her in his arms.

"See, it is getting dark!" she cried. "We must go down. Where is Pablo? Leave those things for him to fetch."

It had grown suddenly dark, with a mist that betokened heat despite the coming night. They could scarcely see each other. He felt for her hand and took it in his. How the contact thrilled him!

"Permit me to guide you," he begged. "Do not be hard on me. How could I help it? Come with me; I think I remember the way."

He led her by the hand, but before they had proceeded many yards she stumbled. Quick as lightning he stretched out his arm and caught her, literally caught her in his arms. And then the love that was consuming him refused to be restrained; he pressed her to his breast and kissed her. He imprinted passionate kisses on her crimson lips, on her cheeks, on her hair, and she remained passive in his wild embrace.

"She does love me, she does love me!" was all he could say or think, and the Scottish mountain was transformed for the time into a Garden of Eden.

But the mist lifted, and she aroused herself as the sound of approaching footsteps was heard. Pablo came in sight, and a conversation ensued between him and Sylvia.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed, as Pablo finished with a strong expression and a look of despair. "He is dreadfully worried. He says that the only chance of getting a room for me is in a cottage some way off, and the occupant of the cottage says that she has let the only room she has to spare to a gentleman for this night. Do you know the district, Mr. Blair? Can you help me? Pablo doesn't mind where he sleeps, and I would not mind sleeping in the open, up here, but I think a storm is imminent."

"That must be the room I have taken!" exclaimed Allan. "Of course, it is at your service! I can get a room elsewhere. You see, it is different for me; I can have a rug in a kitchen, if need be!"

She thanked him volubly. She made no reference to the passionate kisses, but she glanced at him somewhat shyly now; not with that calm, unconscious gaze of an hour or so before. Allan's heart bounded as he observed this, for it was to him a proof that he had awakened love within her.

Pablo walked behind them, and Allan felt inclined to wish him at Madrid or anywhere else. Lover-like, he wanted to repeat the caresses, but he couldn't do it with that evil-looking Spaniard dogging their steps.

"He'll have to go as soon as we are married," muttered Allan savagely.

"What was that—Mr. Blair?"

There was a brief pause before she pronounced his name, as though she would have said "Allan." At least, that was how he interpreted it.

"I was thinking that Pablo was exceedingly faithful to you," he replied, evasively. "I wish he would go on or fall behind, and leave us to ourselves, Sylvia!"

She laughed. It was the first time he had heard her laugh, for it appeared to demand too much effort to do more than smile languidly. The laugh, however, did not please him; it was just a little ironical.

"You men are always like that at first, are you not? Will you change towards me?"

"Never!" declared Allan fervently.

"I fear you will!" she said with a sigh.

Allan occupied the time between that moment and their arrival at the door of the cottage in protesting that he would not change one jot. The matter had to be explained to Mrs. Angus. She was willing to permit the lady to occupy the room instead of Mr. Blair, but she explained aside to him that she hoped the servant would keep out of the house, and that she did not understand why the lady had been unable to get a room elsewhere. All that, however, passed unheeded by Allan Blair; in fact, he became tired of her explanation and cut it short.

It was growing dusk, and Allan felt that he had no right to make people talk by trying to arrange to spend an hour with Sylvia in Mrs. Angus' parlour, especially as this parlour would be required as a bedroom for the two boys who had had to give up their own. So he went off, forgetting that he had his night shirt and toilet requisites in his bag.

Allan Blair got a bed for the night, and contrived to get a fair quantity of tired nature's sweet restorer. As soon as he

decently could he presented himself at the cottage of Mrs. Angus and inquired for Sylvia.

"Bless you, sir!" exclaimed the surprised woman. "She went off early, and that furrin servant carried the bag, and the lady said that they were to call for you!"

"Gone!" gasped Allan.

Mrs. Angus could give no clue to the whereabouts of the missing beauty and Pablo. Blair made a few inquiries, but he soon gave up the quest, for it would have brought ridicule on him.

Mrs. Wentworth had managed to carry off about £20 and a little jewellery. Not a big haul for one who must have been an accomplished hotel thief. He understood why she was disappointed that he was not one of a house party; it would then have been possible, so she thought, to get an invite, or in some way to gain the opportunity of making a big haul.

It was about three months afterwards that he received the note which he kept locked in that little box, and at which he looked at long intervals. It inclosed a £20 note and the jewellery stolen from him. It ran:

"I have repented bitterly of my deceit and theft. That was the first time that I realised what love is. I had been brought up in vice, but when I looked back on that afternoon and reflected, it gave a new turn to my existence. I rid myself of my accomplice at the first opportunity, but I had to fly or he would have murdered me. I have saved part of the proceeds of that robbery, and I have since managed to make up the total. Accept it, and forgive and forget! No, do not forget! Think that your caresses have brought one wicked woman back to truth."

"It was a foolish fascination on my part, and I should certainly not have been guilty of it had I been thirty-three instead of twenty-five," said Blair, as he shook himself, and prepared to go out for a walk. "But it did some good!"

George Day.

ON BOARD A LINER.

Telling of Two Women and One Man.

Dorothy stood on the upper deck of the liner and looked down at the busy decks. The scene filled her with a passionate delight, for the confusion of arriving passengers, the loading of trunks and baggage, the officers from the company dashing here and there with papers, the noise from the engine of the great crane that was loading the hold with luggage, all meant to her "going home." She was glad she knew no one and could stand there and try to realise that at last the moment had come to which she had been looking forward for six months. She laughed softly to herself at her own delight.

"Nobody could understand me," she thought, "if they knew that I've counted every day since I left my own country until I could go back again. I wanted to come because I had to see things, and I wouldn't have missed it all for worlds, but now that I have grasped my opportunity, seen all of Europe I could in six months, I am glad, glad it's over and I'm going home."

The last warning bell to visitors had sounded, the last delinquent passenger had arrived, frightened at the hour, and had been hustled on board, the ropes had been loosened rom the pier, and, with a thrill, Dorothy felt the first faint movement of the ship as it swung gently from the dock and took its slow course down the river towards the English Channel. Her eyes grew misty as she looked towards the brighter line of water ahead, and thought how they would plough steadily on through the dancing channel out into the sea.

"And the next thing will be our own beautiful harbour!" she said, and turned from the rail to meet the eyes of a man who stood behind her, and who had the air of having been there for some time.

"Henry!" Dorothy exclaimed, and held out her hand. "I never was so surprised in my life. I didn't even know you were over here."

"I knew you would be surprised and I waited without speaking for you to turn, so as not to spoil it. I trust you are delighted—I am."

"Oh, I am awfully glad," Dorothy said heartily. "I left the Pearsons in Brussels and am all alone. It is delightful to fall in with an old friend, and especially some one from home. Have you been over long?"

"About four months. Didn't your family tell you?"

"No; I suppose they forgot it."

Dorothy was now very glad to find that she knew some one, for the time would pass more pleasantly with Henry to talk and listen to. They had always known one another, and yet had never been much together. They fell at once into a friendly intimacy and Dorothy found herself wondering why she had never seen more of him, when they were at home; why they had met only at "the big thing" and never been in the small and more intimate circle. She really knew little about him or his affairs, and yet she called him by his first name, and would have been surprised at anything but "Dorothy" from him. That was because they had played together long ago.

"How perfectly delightful he is!" she thought more than once, when he had tucked her rug about her and then sat down beside her as she lay comfortably in her deck chair, and they had talked of places they liked in the old world they were leaving.

When the first days were over and the ship's company shaken and sifted and settled into place, she told herself she was glad it was a slow steamer. "Not that I'm not eager to get home, but I do enjoy the life on shipboard." A little thought obtruded itself that Henry made it enjoyable, and, as she always talked with herself as though she were two, she replied: "Of course he does. He is so agreeable and sensible," and then picked up her book.

"Do you know," said Henry, early one morning, as they walked up and down on the deck still damp from its daily cleaning and breathed in the sharp, bracing air, "there are lots of pretty girls on board?"

"Yes, all those Canadian girls are pretty," Dorothy answered.

"Have you noticed the blonde, with the floppy hair? She is the prettiest of the lot. I like the way her hair blows out in straight little strings."

"What a close observer you are," said Dorothy, conscious of a sudden dislike to straight, light hair that "flopped."

Later that morning Henry sat for two hours out in the bow talking to the owner of the hair, and Dorothy knew where he was all the time and told herself she didn't mind. How could she expect to monopolise the one attractive man on board? And, anyway, she didn't want any one with her all the time. But when Henry came and threw himself down beside her and said: "She isn't as nice as she looks, Dorothy. She's silly!" Dorothy felt her spirits go up and she talked more brightly and entertainingly than she ever had before, and for the rest of the voyage Henry was a constant companion.

And so the time passed, and the last day came. They steamed along, in sight of land all morning, and early in the afternoon entered the harbour.

Dorothy told herself that here, at last, was Australia, the

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land she had been hungry for, and felt no answering throb from within; nothing but an unwillingness to leave the ship. She sat in her chair close to the rail and on the foot of it sat Henry, his forehead against the rail, his eyes on the white foam at the vessel's side. Dorothy was looking at his profile, when he turned suddenly and met her eyes. There was a seriousness in his face that was new to Dorothy.

"I've made an awful fool of myself this summer," he said.

For some unaccountable reason Dorothy felt nervous, but she said: "Have you? How?"

Henry turned his eyes back to the water.

"I've come back to my own country in love with a girl I have no right to be in love with. I don't want to get off the steamer. I wish I could take command of this boat and head it toward Europe this minute."

Dorothy's hands clasped each other very tight.

"Why have you no right to be in love with her?" she asked.

"Because, when I left Australia, I was engaged to marry another girl."

"Oh," said Dorothy, shrinking back, "I didn't know that!"

"Nobody knew it," Henry went on. "I met the other girl in Germany—she's an Australian of course—and, some way, I don't know how it happened, but I got to care more than I ever thought I could care for anyone."

Henry's eyes were still on the water, and he did not see the colour fade from the pretty face so near him.

"I told her about the first girl when I saw how it all might be, and then, instead of going away, I stayed until I couldn't go, and now it's all in a terrible mess. Dorothy, what do you think I ought to do?"

"Why do you ask my advice?" said the girl coldly.

"I don't know. Perhaps because you seem to be a girl a fellow can believe in." Dorothy felt a lump rising in her throat, but she swallowed it, and said:

"I think you should break with the girl you care the least for."

"That's selfish, isn't it?"

"No! You have no right to marry the first now that you care for the second more. It is wrong to her. Tell her and she will free you, even if it breaks her heart. She won't even blame you, for loving seems to be something ruled from outside of us—by some unjust, cruel, wilful power," Dorothy finished passionately.

"I will tell her if you say it's best, but it makes me feel like a cur," said Henry.

"It's the only thing to do," Dorothy replied, the fire gone from her voice and her eyes fixed listlessly on the nearing shore.

"You are a brick to be so easy on me," said Henry.

"Why should I be severe on you? You can't help it, can you?"

"No; but girls don't usually understand how a man can make such a mess of things. They never make mistakes."

"You don't know anything about it!" she answered quickly. "I know of two girls who have made dreadful, pitiful fools of themselves over the same man!"

But Henry smiled in disbelief.

Two hours later they parted at the docks.

H. Fielden.

THIS WEEK'S COMPETITION.

This week we are willing to present a **handsome solid silver pencil-case** to the reader who constructs the most interesting paragraph out of the words used in the sub-titles to the stories which appear in this number. The three lines of italics in the "Confessions of Cynthia" heading are not to be used, and no word must appear oftener than it does in the sub-titles. **Ten consolation prizes, consisting of cut glass solid silver topped scent bottles, and silver bangles,** will be presented to readers whose efforts come next in order of merit. Communications should be addressed to "The Competition Editor of *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, W.C.," and envelopes should be marked "Sub-titles." The closing date of this competition is June 28th.

WOBBLE'S BURGLAR.

A recent paragraph in a Sunday paper greatly interested the Rev. Mr. Wobbles. It stated that the Rev. Hugh O. Pentecost had said that if he should find a burglar in his house he would "go to him unarmed and talk to him as I would to a friend whom I desired to help. If he then desired to take my goods I would make no protest, nor would I cause his arrest. I would follow him to the door and invite him to come again."

As he read this Mr. Wobbles' face beamed with sympathising assent.

"That's what I call good common-sense," he remarked half aloud. "If Providence ever sends a burglar to my house that is just the way I trust I shall have the grace to treat him."

Ah, how little the reverend gentleman knew of the present, let alone the future.

Even then the burglar was on his way to him.

* * * * *

The shades of night had fallen with unusual deliberation. They had fallen to the extent of about 3 a.m. The Rev. Wobbles awoke with a start. There was someone in the house—someone who was stirring stealthily. The Rev. Wobbles was not a coward. He arose and proceeded to investigate. He heard sounds in the back parlour and went there. The burglar was there, and his dark lantern made him visible to the naked eye.

* * * * *

The Rev. Mr. Wobbles explained his friend Pentecost's system, and the burglar kindly offered to help to put it into practical operation.

"It's a good scheme," acquiescently remarked the burglar, "and if only more coves 'ud adopt it, us blokes 'ud have a sight easier time. Ther perfeshion is full of trials and tribberlations, 'specially trials."

Then the good parson talked feelingly on the subject of covetousness, and the badness of pretty much everything.

For a moment the criminal's heart was touched, but only for a moment, and then he proceeded to fill a large bag, which he had brought expressly for the occasion, with the parson's light and portable valuables.

* * * * *

At last the burglar departed. Mr. Wobbles had helped him pack the bag. He assisted him to the front door, and even looked up and down the dark street to make sure that no police officer, accidently lingering near, should "collar" his burglar.

* * * * *

The next day the Rev. Mr. Wobbles was industriously rewriting his next Sunday's sermon. He had written it before, but the burglar had inadvertently taken it with the other plunder.

* * * * *

A knock at the door. In response to the parson's cordial "Come in" a stranger entered. He was a meek-mannered, serious-visaged man.

"You don't seem to know me," he said, "but I'm the burglar who called on you last night. I stole your sermon. But I read it, and in consequence I am a reformed man. I wish to return your stuff, and give myself up to justice."

The burglar insisted upon it. He was tried, convicted, and was sentenced to penal servitude for life.

* * * * *

This chapter, containing, as it did, the moral to this tale, was too long for this page, and is regretfully omitted. **L. B.**

YOU CAN BEGIN TO-DAY.

OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION.

By HENRY FARMER.

Author of "Fettered Lives," "As a Man Sows," "In the Grip of the Law," etc.

For New Readers.

A BELT full of diamonds has been stolen from a safe belonging to Mr. Mansfield, a wealthy banker, by Seaton Revelle (who is a friend of the banker's) and an accomplice named Benjamin Beard. Revelle accuses Alec Scarsdale, who is in love with Esther, Mr. Mansfield's daughter, of the crime, and he is sentenced to sixteen years' penal servitude. Mr. Crump, late Chief-Inspector at Scotland Yard, feeling sure Scarsdale is innocent and Revelle is guilty, sets himself to prove the latter's guilt. Mr. Mansfield as fully believes in Scarsdale's guilt as does Esther in his innocence, and his friendship for Revelle increases. Revelle constantly visits the banker's house in an endeavour to win Esther's love, but so far has not prospered at all. While talking with the girl one day, Mr. Mansfield's new maid, Vance, enters the room with a tray bearing cups of coffee. No sooner does she catch sight of Revelle than she drops the tray, and, pointing to Revelle, screams: "That—that man is *my* husband!" But Revelle, by sheer force of will, compells her to acknowledge her mistake. In the meanwhile, Scarsdale has got into serious trouble for attacking a warder who had used Esther's name in a very coarse and brutal manner. Later on, Crump and Esther are walking in the early morning; the latter sees a woman by the reservoir close to Mr. Mansfield's house, and calls Crump's attention to her.

CHAPTER XVI.
In the Nick of Time.

BUT Crump had already seen!

On the very edge of the reservoir, a woman, her back turned, keeping back the rushes with one hand, was bending forward, peering down into the deep water. It was a horribly suggestive attitude—the attitude of a woman about to leap! It was an instinctive feeling of this that had drawn the words from Esther's lips, and caused her to clutch Crump's arm.

Crump's answer did not take the form of words. He sprang forward. As he did so, the woman straightened up for a moment, removed her hat, and flung it from her.

It is a curious, grim fact—coroners will corroborate it—that nearly every woman who seeks death in the water, removes her hat first. Crump knew this well enough; but he had already jumped at a conclusion.

"Hi!" he barked out sharply.

He had realised that he could not reach her in time. He knew that the chances were a hundred against one that a sudden shock would distract attention from, not accelerate, the deed that was being meditated. His calculation was right. The woman sprang back and swung round, revealing a grey, bloodless face.

A sharp cry burst from Esther. It was Vance.

Crump had reached her now. Taking her hand, he drew it through his arm, and led her away from the bank. She was shivering a little; but she made no resistance. The lifeless eyes looked more lifeless, more hopeless than ever. They seemed to have lost the light of reason. Esther hurried up. Vance glanced at her dully; but she did not seem to recognise her.

"Vance!" whispered Esther. "What—what does this mean?"

The woman shivered a little; then stared at her dully, uncomprehendingly. An awful thought flashed through Esther's mind. Was it possible that the poor woman's reason had left her? She glanced nervously at Crump. The little man's homely face wore a sad, pained look. So this poor creature was Vance, of whom Esther had been speaking, only a few moments ago—the woman who, on the evening before, had suddenly pointed at Seaton Revelle, and had given utterance to those startlingly dramatic words "That man is my husband!"

Crump still held her arm.

"Let me take her!" said Esther gently. She put an arm round the woman. "Vance, you must let me take you home with me at once!"

Esther was not the mistress now, talking to the parlour-maid; but a woman ministering to another woman. Crump, the same pained look on his features, quietly picked up her hat, and gave it to Esther. It was all surpassingly uncanny. Vance moved, looked like an automaton! She suffered Esther to put her hat upon her head without a word.

"Miss Mansfield," said Crump quietly, "you will allow me to come with you as far as the Woodlands!"—Then addressing Vance very gently, "What were you doing just now?"

Pausing, Vance turned and pointed back at the water.

"I saw rest," said the woman, in a low inflexionless voice, "looking up at me from the water, and beckoning, and holding out its arms, and I was going to it, and then there was a cry, and I thought it was Jim's voice—Jim come to snatch me away again!"

She ceased speaking, and pointed up to the sky.

"Do you see him up there?" she whispered, "there, that tiny speck, ever so high up. Jim's afraid of nothing—neither God nor man! See, the speck's growing bigger and bigger. Hark! Don't you hear the crowd cheering—cheering Jim! Only holding on with one hand, his cigar in the other, cool as brass, that's Jim!"

To Esther it was all horribly uncanny, the meaningless babblings of a poor creature whose senses had left her.

"Come," she said, her voice trembling in spite of herself, "we must be going back home now!"

Vance offered no resistance as she started to lead her away again. Crump took her other arm.

"Yes," he said, "we must be going back now." Then very gently—"Who's Jim?"

The lifeless eyes dilated for a moment, and filled with a strange light. For an instant it seemed to Esther that a shadowy look of cunning crept over the bloodless face.

"There's no Jim now," she said softly, "Jim's dead—drowned! I wish that I were at rest too. Sometimes I see a face like Jim's. I did yesterday; but it wasn't Jim's. Oh,

no! It was a mistake, all a mistake. Jim was drowned far, far away from here, and years ago. We loved each other, Jim and I. till——"

She ceased abruptly. Again it seemed to Esther that the shadowy look of cunning crept over the grey face.

There was a long silence. The three figures wended their way slowly through the wood, Vance moving like an automaton.

Only when they were nearing the Woodlands, Esther ventured to speak.

"You know me, don't you, Vance?" she said quietly.

The woman turned her lack-lustre eyes upon her. For a moment their expression was vacant; then changed to one of recognition.

"Yes, you're Miss Mansfield, You've a beautiful face, miss. It's the sort of face that Jim would have admired"—she gave vent to a low, weird laugh—"Jim used to tell me that I was beautiful—once!"

Then she became quite passive again.

"You know where you are now, Vance, don't you?" questioned Esther as they reached the house.

"Yes, miss; but I won't be staying long. Rest will beckon me again! And——"

She stopped abruptly, and relapsed into the old passive state.

The household was up and doing by now. Mrs. Tilley, the house-keeper. was much astonished at the entrance into her room of Miss Esther and "Mr. Penworthy," bringing with them Vance. The kindly old lady had had more than one chat with Mr. Penworthy since he had undertaken the alterations to the front garden, and the little man had quite won her heart. Crump drew her to one side, and briefly and concisely told her what had happened. Vance seemed to take no interest in what was going on.

"She must not be left a moment to herself," said Crump, "a doctor must be sent for at once, and Mr. Mansfield informed as soon as possible. I'm afraid her mind has completely given way. It's very piteous, very sad. To us it seems sudden; but I fancy this must have been threatening for a long time. And now, Mrs. Tilley, if you would be good enough to see about a doctor being summoned, I will take charge of the poor woman. And"—he dropped his voice yet lower—"there's no need for Miss Mansfield to stay. I'm afraid that she's been very upset. It has been very dreadful, harrowing! I hope you don't think that I'm ordering you about, Mrs. Tilley; but it's very serious, this—very critical!"

But Mrs. Tilley was only too thankful of Mr. Penworthy's presence on such an occasion. She left the room, Esther, in response to a look from Crump, going with her.

Vance moved mechanically to the window, and, folding her hands behind her back, stared out. Crump did not speak, only watched her out of his small, grey eyes. His brain was very busy. The woman's mind had undoubtedly given way. It was absolutely necessary that, for the time being, she should be put under restraint. Then the humane, kindly little man became the detective. To him the woman's babblings, when she had pointed up to the sky, to the speck that was not there, had not seemed meaningless as they had to Esther. Only the night before, Tom Jackson had told her that Mr. Seaton Revelle was likely to make a balloon ascent at the entertainment that was to take place in Lord Normanhurst's grounds, and, at the time, Crump had wondered how and where Revelle had acquired his knowledge of, and experience in, things aerial. In his mind he had jumped at several conclusions. He, too, had noticed the shadowy look of cunning that had crossed the poor creature's face when he had asked "Who's Jim?" He had seen the expression again when he had spoken of the mistake that she had made on the previous evening. The question was—was it a mistake?

The little man's expression became extremely thoughtful, though his watchful eyes never left the figure by the window.

He wanted very much to find out more about this Jim—Jim, who feared neither God nor man!

And then Crump pictured to himself a great crowd staring up into the sky, watching a tiny speck that was descending, and, as it became larger, it resolved itself into a man, hanging on to a parachute with one hand—was this what Vance fancied she had seen?

And Mr. Seaton Revelle was an aeronautic enthusiast.

"I must be very careful, very careful indeed!" said the little man to himself, "I am feeling horribly tempted to jump at a huge conclusion. I am tempted to jump at the conclusion that——"

He shook his head. As he did so, Vance turned from the window.

"Jim's dead," she said mechanically, "sometimes I make a mistake, but he's dead, was blown out to sea, and drowned!"

It was positively uncanny, as if the woman had divined his thoughts.

"When and where," asked Crump, "did that happen?"

The woman eyed him with a look of shadowy suspicion; then drew her hand across her forehead.

"It was so long ago," she answered wearily, "and my mind is a blurr. I forget. Sometimes I forget everything, and only wish to go to sleep."

At that moment the door opened, and the doctor, and John Mansfield, who had been aroused, entered. The banker was looking much perturbed. He had heard from Esther all that had happened. Then Mrs. Tilley stepped into the room. After returning the banker's nod with a quiet bow, Crump retired into the background.

"Poor woman!" said the doctor when, after a long verbal examination of Vance he left the room with the banker and Crump, "she must have been suffering from acute melancholia for a long time. I am afraid restraint for the present is absolutely necessary. It's so often the case, melancholia develops into suicidal mania. Of course, I will call in another medical man. In the meantime, she must not be left to herself for a moment. I should suggest, Mr. Mansfield, the County asylum. The poor woman will receive every attention there, and be treated most humanely. Of course her relatives will be communicated with at once. It would be a great help to me if I could have the woman's family history!"

Crump wished to be in possession of that, too, very much. When, some little time after, he was returning to Woodbine Cottage, his face indicated a state of brown study. He occasionally shook his head. When Esther had told him of the startling episode of the previous evening, he had hoped to have found opportunity for cross-questioning Vance. What had just happened, had upset his calculations. It would be hard indeed, to glean anything from Vance now.

"And besides," he muttered, "the extraordinary thing is that though the poor creature has lost her wits, she is suspicious, seems to have a glimmering notion that I want to find out something about Jim. I am positive that there were moments when she was acting, trying to throw me off the scent!"

He pursed up his lips.

"Yes," he went on, "I can trace you back ten years, Mr. Revelle. Then comes a blank. I should so much like to know what you were, and what you were doing with yourself before that time. It would be such a help. You promise to be one of the most consummate rascals it has been my lot to encounter—the biggest, with one exception, and I bottled him up ultimately, I am proud to say!"

Crump was the most modest of men; but on this occasion

he had suffered himself to recall one of his greatest triumphs, not without some feeling of satisfaction. But a moment later he rebuked himself.

"My good fellow," he said, "it's a very big mistake to chortle over past successes, and pat yourself on the back, and tell yourself what a clever fellow you *were*. Never stand still, and look back complacently. That's been the ruin of many a man before now. No, my good fellow, look forward, and try and go one better, and if you fail, don't let it be for the want of effort, that's all! Then you need not be ashamed to look any man in the face!"

Then, suddenly, his face beamed all over.

"Hullo, there's my little sweetheart, Pollie!"

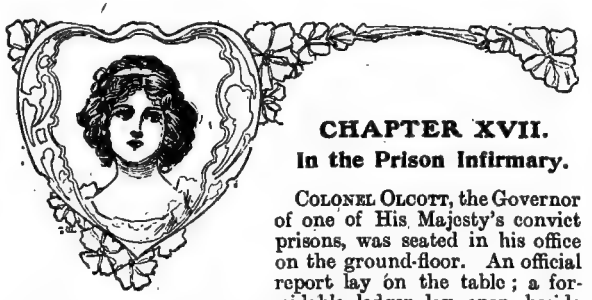
And pulling out a coloured cotton handkerchief, he waved it violently to attract the attention of the little girl who was emerging from Woodbine cottage. The child raced along the road to him. He picked her up in his arms, and mounted her on his shoulder.

"Gallop!" said Pollie.

And singing out "Pollie and I were sweethearts, many a year ago!" the late Chief-Inspector of Scotland Yard obeyed orders, and galloped! He reached the cottage in a breathless condition.

After breakfast, before returning to the Woodlands to set about his horticultural work, he leant for some time over the rustic railings, smoking his pipe.

"Jim!" he muttered, "I want very much to find out more about Jim!"



CHAPTER XVII.

In the Prison Infirmary.

Colonel Olcott, the Governor of one of His Majesty's convict prisons, was seated in his office on the ground-floor. An official report lay on the table; a formidable ledger lay open beside him! Beside him sat the Visiting Director of the prison. Strong iron bars, reaching from roof to floor, divided the office into two parts—the one reserved for the Governor, the other for convicts and their escorts.

A door was flung open, and Alec Scarsdale, handcuffed and guarded by three warders, was brought in. He was looking ghastly. His skin was dry, and burning with a fever.

The Visiting Director eyed him curiously as he was brought close up to the rails. He had carefully been through the details of the charge against Scarsdale, and had interviewed Pettigrew, the assaulted officer, and asked certain questions. He had fully made up his mind as to the form of punishment best suited to Convict 35's offence.

"Alexander Scarsdale, No. 35 T," he said, momentarily consulting an official report before him, "you have been guilty of concealing an iron instrument in your cell, of insubordination, and of brutally assaulting and injuring Assistant-Warder Pettigrew—three separate and most serious offences against prison regulations. Your case has been thoroughly investigated by the governor, and I have his report before me. There is no need to go into it again. In a prison establishment"—the Visiting Director was a gentleman who loved to hear himself talk, and invariably sermonised a convict before passing sentence. Amongst the prisoners he had earned himself the soubriquet of "Long-winded Whiskers"—"in a prison establishment the maintenance of discipline is a chief essential, and we look to those men who have had superior education and advantages in the past to set a good example."

Alexander Scarsdale, close up against the iron bars, listened in silence. Mentally he found himself comparing the director's words with those of the judge who had sentenced him. They were very much the same. The deep irony of it all was that now, as then, he was innocent!

"Such offences as yours," continued the Director, "must be severely dealt with. You will be placed under special orders for six months, wearing leg-chains and the dress that denotes having assaulted an officer, until such time as the Governor may see fit to remit them."

For a moment Alexander Scarsdale gripped the rails before him with his hand-cuffed hands, and, with the look of a caged animal, glared through at the men beyond. But no sound escaped his lips. What was the use of speaking? No one would believe him. It would be a waste of time to tell them that he knew nothing of the iron bar; that he believed it to have been "planted" in his cell by the very warder who had charged him! They would not even listen to him.

He swayed a little. He was feeling frightfully ill: the five days of solitary confinement in the punishment cell had told upon him.

It was a cruel punishment! "Special Orders" meant that besides the degradation of wearing the black and drab dress and heavy fetters—yet these things in themselves were little to him—he would not be allowed to communicate or receive letters for the next eight months. All the marks that he had earned towards the remission of his sentence were forfeited. That was the terrible part of the punishment.

Whilst under Special Orders, his cell would be inspected every hour. No books, except the Bible, prayer-book, and hymn-book, would be allowed him. He would be placed on penal class diet, similar to that supplied him in the punishment cell. He would be remitted to labour, but the right of exercise and conversation on Sundays would be denied him. His daily exercise would be taken with other convicts wearing the black and drab, or the drab and yellow dresses—in company, in fact, with the worst characters in the prison!

And the irony of it all was that he was innocent now, as innocent as he had been when he stood in the dock of the Old Bailey!

But Alec Scarsdale was not destined to wear the black dress or fetters that day.

As in response to a tap on the shoulder from one of the warders', he turned away from the rails, a sudden blackness veiled his eyes. He reeled forward,. made a clutch at the air, and fell heavily, face downwards. It had come—the break-down!

When he opened his eyes, Governor and Visiting Director had vanished, nor was he back again in the damp, dark punishment cell where he had caught the chill that had developed into a high fever. He was lying in a long, white-washed room, lighted by sky-lights, heavily barred, and with a large stove at the end. It was much like the ward of an ordinary hospital, beds standing at intervals against the walls; but a couple of uniformed warders were strolling up and down, and in the place of the sweet woman—figures that one associates with the hospital, rough-looking men in convict dress were moving to and fro, now turning a pillow, now administering a draught.

It was some little time before Scarsdale recovered his scattered senses. His blood seemed to be burning in his veins. His pulse was throbbing fiercely. Then everything returned with a rush. A low, feverish cry involuntarily burst from his lips. It brought one of the convict nurses to his side—a brawny fellow, with square jaws, and a low forehead, and a livid scar stretching from ear to eye-brow. He raised up Scarsdale, and shook out his pillow.

"Covey," he whispered, "'ow are you feelin' now? Keep your pecker up. You've landed in the most comf'rble shop in the place. Take my tip, and don't you be in too great an 'urry to git out of it. When you're feelin' better, do a sham."

The convict nurse managed to rattle all this off before one of the warders had time to reach the bed and inquire how Scarsdale felt. He spoke kindly, and Scarsdale's grey eyes, for a moment, lit up. He was grateful to the man who

had treated him as a human being. The warder moved on again. The convict nurse still hovered by the bedside.

"Thank you," said Scarsdale. "Who are you?"

"No. 375, ten stretch for house-breaking, and just finishing my time. Shall be out on ticket in less than a month, thank goodness. Going to go straight, s'welp me, if I can keep clear o' drink and some of my old pals."

A sudden flush coloured Scarsdale's face, as a thought raced through his brain.

What if he could find some way of entrusting him with a message to Esther—a message that would not run the gauntlet of prying officers' eyes. His heart gave a great throb, and, for a moment, pain and fever were forgotten! If—if only he could get a letter through to Esther!

Yes, he felt that if only he could be sure of getting a letter through to Esther, somehow the burden of life would be easier to bear. Then the old longing for freedom came over him. Once out of the infirmary his chance would be more hopeless than it had ever been. He would be wearing chains! He glanced round the ward, eyed the barred skylights!

Oh, God! For freedom!

Then the thought of Gentleman Jack, the man who, like himself, had suffered at the hands of Seaton Revelle. He had hoped to glean something more from him about Revelle; but now, when he went back to the quarries, it would be to work in another gang. Under his breath he feverishly cursed Assistant-Warder Pettigrew; yet once his hot blood tingled with a feeling of almost savage satisfaction. He had paid the scoundrel; put a mark on him that he would wear for many a day. Scarsdale was no brute, and, so far, in spite of the many human brutes with whom he was to come in contact, his refinement had not deteriorated. What he had given Pettigrew, Pettigrew had absolutely deserved.

The convict-nurse approached his bed.

"I say," whispered Scarsdale, "what's your name?"

The man at once started to smooth out his pillow.

"Ben Needham!"

Scarsdale hungrily scanned his face. It was ugly, rough; but not repulsive. He had meant to wait, to make sure of the man's character; but he could master himself no longer.

"I say, when you go out, could you—could you, do you think, smuggle out a letter for me? You would be well paid!"

"Who said anythink about bein' paid!" whispered the man, still busy with the pillow. "Look here, it's a risky job to get a bit of stiff through; but I dessay I could work it; but more difficult than gettin' it through, is the writin' of it, and gettin' 'old of the paper. Howsomdever, maybe I can sneak a bit of the doctor's paper on which 'e writes 'is perscriptions, and an envelope. You'll 'ave to do your writing under the bed-clothes, laddie, and be mighty sharp about it! I'll be seeing about it presently; but I can't say for certin when your chance'll come. P'raps I shall be able to get one o' my patients"—the man grinned knowingly—"to create a counter-diversion that'll give you opportunity!"

Scarsdale's burning face flushed hot.

"God bless you!" he whispered.

Ben Needham moved away.

"I reckon," he muttered to himself, "it's his sweetheart 'e's wantin' to get that bit of stiff to. Well, I'll risk it. I don't mind runnin' a bit of a risk for one o' the right sort. And 'e *is* all right, poor cove. 'E's very dicky and queer, though, and somethink ought to be give 'im to take down that fever of 'is!"

Boom!

The whole ward vibrated! Not a convict-invalid that did not start up in his bed.

It was the boom of a gun!

A prisoner had escaped!

Quick words passed from bed to bed. Even the warders showed signs of excitement.

Still greater was the excitement when, scarcely had the roar died away, the door of the room was unlocked, and four convicts entered bearing a stretcher, on which lay a livid-hued convict, his brow damp with the dews of agony.

And as they bore him past, Scarsdale started and shuddered, for he had recognised the distorted features of Sid Baxter, the man in "the canaries," who, with Gentleman Jack, had worked alongside him in the quarry. They laid him on a bed, and screens were placed around.

Five minutes later, Needham hurried to Scarsdale's bed.

"D'ye know wot's happened?" he whispered. "Assistant-Warder Pettigrew's been killed in the quarry. Baxter tried to do a run, but was shot down by the rifleman. But they say No. 36, known as Gentleman Jack, has got clean away!"

Pettigrew killed in the quarry! Scarsdale lay back in his bed, numbed by the intelligence. A great feeling of awe was upon him. It only seemed but yesterday that the man was hectoring it over him, taunting him, and now death, swift death, had overtaken him.

"They say," whispered Needham, "one of the cranks of the crane snapped, and a mass of stone crashed down upon 'im. I've know'd such things happen afore. It was then Baxter started to run; but I ain't 'eard how the other managed to git away."

Scarsdale could find no words to reply. Heaven knew he had hated Pettigrew, the man who had made his life a hell upon earth, who had heaped every possible insult and ignominy upon him, but the man was dead now, and he did not war against the dead, even though the memory of his brutality must last for many a day.

Assistant-Warder Pettigrew had been summoned to render an account of his wardership to the great Governor before Whom, in the fulness of time, convict and warder must take their stand, there to be judged, not by the felon garb, or the badge of office, but by their lives.

For a long while Scarsdale could think of nothing else. He scarcely noticed the hurrying to and fro in the ward, the entrance of the doctor; scarcely heard the horrible cursings and ravings that came from behind the screen where Baxter lay. But gradually the sounds penetrated into his senses, and he found himself listening.

The felon was dying.

The warder who had fired upon him had purposely fired low, but it is no easy matter to hit a running man in one particular spot, and the bullet had inflicted a mortal wound.

The felon was dying, and would soon be beyond the grip of the law.

On either side of the bed stood armed warders, and it required all their strength to hold him down. Again and again he struggled to rise, crying out that he wasn't a "goner" yet, and he'd "do for some more of them screws afore he sent in his checks." He would have no sky-pilots round his bed, he shouted, when the chaplain stepped within the screens.

Then, gradually, the ravings and blasphemy subsided, and he lay back exhausted. But even then those in the ward could hear him moaning and mumbling as his mind wandered back over the past. Sometimes he was cracking an imaginary crib, and babbled of jemmies and silent matches; sometimes, he was cursing a confederate who had played him false; then it would be Pettigrew. Once he even laughed—a low, horrible laugh—as if something had tickled his fancy. At another time he was calculating out the chances of escape, and those round the bed saw his eyes momentarily glitter with an unwonted light. Then he was grumbling at the food, and declaring his loaf was under weight and the

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potatoes rotten. The end came suddenly. After a few moments' silence, Curly Baxter seemed to regain consciousness. His eyes wandered from the face of one warder to another. The mouth relaxed with a distorted grin.

"I've tried to give yer the slip twice," he said, in a low, husky voice; "the fust time yer spoiled me, and put me in slangs and canaries; the second time, yer shot me down as yer would a dawg. But this time"—he gave a hoarse chuckle—"not all yer screws, nor guv'nors, nor yet gaols, will hold me in. This time, I'm goin' to give yer the slip!"

So great was the silence that prevailed in the ward, Scarsdale could hear every word the man said.

"Yus," he went on, "and wherever I'm bound for, it can't be much wuss than this!"

He closed his eyes. A long silence followed. Then the watchers round the bed saw the grim, livid features again relax into a smile, a smile that had something of softness in it. He opened his eyes, but the light that shone from them told that the mind was again wandering.

He half sat up in the bed and stretched out his arms as if to welcome someone.

"Liz, old gal," they heard him whisper, "I've given 'em the slip, and I'm comin' to yer. I ain't seen yer, old gal, since I stood in the dock for the larst time. They told me yer warn't true to me arter I was lagged, but I never believed 'em. And I'm comin' to yer now, old gal, I'm coming to——"

He sank back—to speak no more. And those that were round, as they gazed down at the felon's coarse, criminal features, realised that even in that black heart there had been one spot of light!

Scarsdale did not sleep that night. The tragic incidents of that day repeated themselves with a gruesome pertinacity; and he would think of Gentleman Jack, and wonder if he had made good his escape. He struggled to crush back an envious feeling. If only such an opportunity had been granted him! Oh, to get away from it all, to get away from it all! He turned and twisted in his bed. He felt his blood growing hotter and hotter as feverish thoughts, in quick succession, inflamed him. Again and again he breathed the name of the woman he loved—despairingly, yet as if seeking to draw consolation from its utterance. Never had the craving for freedom been more intense than it was during the dragging hours of that night. Dawn brought light, but not rest from harassing thoughts.

Even the tin, in which the pint of milk—especially ordered him by the doctor—was served with his breakfast, had the effect of stimulating the wild craving for freedom. He had drained down the contents, and was still holding the tin, when he noticed that some lines had been scratched on the polished surface. Much rubbing had almost obliterated them in parts, but after a while he managed to decipher them—illiterate, doggerel lines, the words mis-spelt, scratched there by some poor convict who had craved, as he now craved, for freedom.

Scarsdale had some difficulty in deciphering the words. They ran thus:

Yer bloomin' king 'is kingdom,
Yer miser wants 'is gold;
But yer convict cries for freedom—
Wot's kingdoms, or wot's gold?

I axe no blooming kingdom,
Nor yet a mint o' gold;
But I prays to Gawd for freedom—
A convict makin bold;

Ten stretch 'tween me and freedom,
"Ten," says the judge, says he;
My prayers, p'rhaps Gawd'll heed 'em,
Poor convict though I be!

Scarsdale lost sight of the unconscious humour, the bad spelling, the want of sequence in the poor words, and only saw the deep craving that had inspired them.

"Poor fellow," he muttered, "his sentence was ten years, and mine—mine is sixteen!"

When Needham came to his bedside, Scarsdale eagerly inquired if any news had been heard of Gentleman Jack, and he was unselfishly glad to hear that he still evaded capture!

Could he ever, he considered, get a chance like Gentleman Jack's?

"And look 'ee 'ere," whispered Needham, "it might be to-morrow, it might be this afternoon, there's no statin' any definite time; it depends on when I can manage to sneak the paper; but I've fixed up things with one o' my patients what's a champion kidder, and your chance to write that letter will be comin' along, and when it comes, make the most of it!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I would not have this Gentleman's Reputation!"

"Dear me!" ejaculated Crump, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, "in the excitement of everything I quite forgot to give Miss Mansfield that letter. Ah, well! I am sure to have an opportunity this morning. Poor girl! It will be a painful pleasure. It was very thoughtful indeed of that good fellow, Tom. I am very pleased with both him and Freddie. I do hope that one or both will succeed in making friends with that rascal Railton, otherwise Tomlinson. I should have enjoyed doing it myself, but I am afraid he has neither forgotten nor forgiven Mr. Duffey!"

The little man's eyes twinkled as he stepped out into the road, and set out for the Woodlands.

The operations that were being carried out in front of the banker's house were extensive, and Mr. Penworthy had the assistance of Mr. Mansfield's gardener, and a couple of labourers from the village. Banks, the gardener, had, not unnaturally, at first rather resented this intrusion on the part of a horticultural specialist, but Crump was possessed of infinite tact, and had, moreover, compelled the admiration of Banks by his remarkable knowledge and skill; and though the whole affair was, as Benny Beard would have said, "a put-up job" to give Crump *raison d'être* for being in the immediate vicinity, nevertheless the little man was genuinely and deeply interested in his work.

He was in earnest conversation with Banks on the subject of azaleas when Esther emerged from the house. Her father had more than once remarked with pleasure on the deep interest that she took in the alterations. He was thankful for anything that occupied her mind.

Crump left Banks to join her. They strolled away together to the gate at the end of the drive. One glance at Esther was sufficient to tell that she had not recovered from the shock of that early morning. Her face was white; there was a nervous look in her dilated eyes.

"My father," she whispered, leaning on the close gate, "is making arrangements for poor Vance to go to the County asylum. She will probably be taken there this afternoon. It seems so dreadful; but I suppose—I suppose it's the only thing that can be done!"

"I'm afraid so," said Crump, "it is the best thing for the poor woman!"

He drew out the letter Tom Jackson had given him, and which he himself had inclosed in a plain envelope.

"I meant to have given you this this morning," he said, "that fine young fellow, Tom Jackson, gave it to me to give to you. I think both he and my nephew, Freddie, are going to be of assistance to us; but I'm going to ask you, Miss Mansfield, not to open that envelope just yet!"

Little dreaming what it contained, Esther thrust the envelope in the bosom of her dress.

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"I owe Jackson," she said, "a debt of gratitude that I shall never be able to pay!"

And then, for the first time, Crump learnt of the letter the young constable had brought Esther from Alec Scarsdale when he lay at Warham police-station, and of the letter he had taken back.

It had been a terrible breach of discipline that, had it been discovered, must have meant dismissal with ignominy for Jackson, but Crump was unconventional, and he was a private individual now. His face beamed.

"Very, very wrong of him," he said in a low voice, "from an official point of view—a most grievous breach of discipline, but—well, well! There are times when we violate the letter, but not the spirit of the law—and God bless Tom Jackson, say I, for his gross breach of discipline."

The little man coughed, looked rather ashamed of himself, and then glanced down the road, for the sharp clatter of hoofs, and the rattle of wheels had reached him. A moment later, a dog-cart, drawn by a high-stepping, spirited cob, and moving at a spanking pace, swung round into sight.

"Ah!" ejaculated Crump, "our friends from The Firs!"

Seaton Revelle, perched up high, and his shoulders well squared, his hands working a little from the strain on the reins, was looking just a trifle worn and tired. Mr. Faversham—otherwise Benny—beside him, was trying to look unconcerned and comfortable, but the high-spirited cob had got on his nerves. Not that he was a coward, but he was out of his element. He preferred his feet or a bicycle, infinitely, as methods of locomotion.

Revelle reined up opposite the gate. A slight expression of uneasiness flickered across Benny's face at sight of Esther. She pricked his conscience somehow—made him think of that poor fellow doing time in a convict prison. Revelle might "gas," and make out that she was beginning to forget all about him, but Benny did not believe it.

Revelle raised his hat with well-bred grace; Benny did likewise, but he lacked his companion's ease of manner.

"Good morning, Miss Mansfield!" said Revelle, then, with a nod to Crump, "Morning, Penworthy!"

"Good morning to you, sir!" said Crump, removing his broad-brimmed felt hat with just sufficient deference to imply that he realised that he was addressing a superior; then moved away and became apparently absorbed in contemplating a flower-bed, and took out a note-book. But he was just within ear-shot.

The cob showed a tendency, to Benny's infinite terror, to do a dance on its hind legs, but Revelle quieted him; then bent forward.

"Miss Mansfield," he said, "I've just heard from my fellow, Railton, about what's happened this morning—about that poor woman. I'm most frightfully distressed, especially after what happened last night."

Servants will talk, and tradesmen carry news from house to house, and it was already known that one of the servants at the Woodlands had gone out of her mind and had tried to commit suicide. Railton had heard the gossip, and had communicated it to his master as he set his breakfast.

Mr. Penworthy had evidently been seized with a brilliant idea, for he was pencilling vigorously in his note-book.

"Yes!" said Esther with a shudder, but looking at Revelle rather fixedly, "the poor woman's gone quite out of her mind. She again spoke of having made a mistake last night. Poor creature, she seems haunted by the remembrance of someone called 'Jim'!"

Every word reached Crump, he looked up for a moment from his note-book.

Whether it was due to some irritating fly, or whether Revelle jerked the cob's sensitive mouth, it would have been difficult to say; but the animal suddenly reared up on its hind legs.

"So, ho! Steady, steady, steady!"

Revelle's lips had tightened across his teeth. A few moments later he had the cob under control again. Benny was wishing to Heaven that he had some decent excuse to get down and walk.

"He's rather fresh this morning, Miss Mansfield," went on Revelle, "'Jim' you say? Poor woman! Have you been able to gather any particulars about her past?"

"No. Only she talks of this Jim! It seems that he was drowned. My father has made arrangements for her removal to the County asylum. It seems dreadful, but everybody says it is for the best!"

Revelle bent forward and smoothed the cob's flank with his whip. Esther could not see his eyes now. She had been watching the effects of her words all the while. Revelle's eyes—for all his mastery over himself—were bright with a look of relief. It looked as if he were going to weather the corner all right after all; mad, and packed away in the County asylum, this woman who had suddenly returned again into his life, and had threatened to topple to the ground all his ambitions and far-reaching schemes! His blood was pulsing with a savage thrill of exultation.

He was master of himself when he again glanced at Esther. For all her pallor and the dark rings round her eyes, how charming she looked! How graceful!

"Well, Miss Mansfield," he said, "we must be getting along. We're bound for the Towers—I've promised to see Normanhurst about this entertainment, and fix up details. I'm going to take charge of the aerial department"—he laughed—"the balloon will be captive during the greater portion of the day, and I'm going to take up parties, a guinea a head; then, if weather permits, I shall fly off in the afternoon. A lot of arranging to be done! It means a traction-engine and goodness only knows what. By-the-by, you're going to sing at the concert in the school-room?"

"Yes!"

"So's my friend here, Faversham. He's a funny fellow when it comes to the singing of a comic song!"

Crump smiled softly to himself.

Esther was again looking at Revelle.

Suddenly she saw his eyes dilate, and a curious greyness steal over his features.

He was looking beyond her, over her head, at something she did not see!

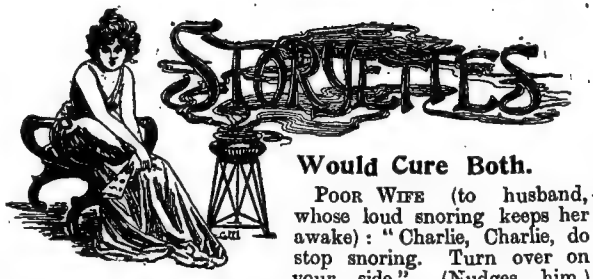
(*To be continued.*)

[**Another splendid instalment in next Tuesday's *Short Stories.***]

HE: "I am very fond of you." She: "How well our tastes agree." He: "What, are you fond of me?" She: "Oh, no! Of myself."

LAWYER (meeting friend in street): "I'm sorry for you, Short, but Snipps, the tailor, has put his account against you in my hands for collection." Short: "And you're going to try and collect it, eh? Well, I'm sorry for you. Ta, ta, old man; you know my address."

"I SUPPOSE, Henry," said the old gentleman to the new son-in-law, "that you are aware the cheque for £5,000 I put among your wedding presents was merely for effect?" "Oh, yes, sir," responded the cheerful Henry, "and the effect was excellent. The bank cashed it this morning without a word."



Would Cure Both.

POOR WIFE (to husband, whose loud snoring keeps her awake): "Charlie, Charlie, do stop snoring. Turn over on your side." (Nudges him.) Husband, only half awake, grunts, turns on his side, and continues to snore. Wife has happy idea. Remembers a line from an article called "How to Prevent Snoring." Gives her husband a second nudge, which elicits another grunt. "Oh, Charlie. If you keep your mouth shut you'd be all right." Charlie (still semi-conscious): "So would you."

Old Gold Preferred.

MADGE: "Do you prefer blonde men?" Beatrice: "No, I prefer old gold—very old, and plenty of gold."

True, Isn't It?

EVERY woman is sorry for some other woman on account of something her husband told her about the other woman's husband.

Why She Was Sad.

MR. BILKINS: "What a sad face that woman has." Mrs. Bilkins: "Yes, poor thing. She has either loved and lost, or loved and got him."

A Cutting Remark.

HE: "Don't you think it wrong for people to marry their intellectual inferiors?" She: "Yes—always wrong, and in some cases quite impossible."

Glad to Lose Her.

NEIGHBOR: "And you expect to support my daughter on two pounds a week?" Clarkets: "Yes, sir." Neighbor: "Well, go ahead, my heart refuses, but my pocket-book consents. She costs me ten pounds."

A Delicate Difference.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, you wouldn't believe it, but it's true that these weights are so delicate that they mark the difference between a blonde and a brunette hair." "And which weighs the less?" "The lighter one."

Willing to Return Her.

FATHER (trying a would-be son-in-law): "Young man, will you be able to take care of my daughter in the style to which she has always been accustomed?" Young Man: "I'll guarantee it, sir, or return the girl. Come, it's a bargain."

Why they Disagreed.

PEACEMAKER: "But, my dear man, why cannot you and your wife agree to live in harmony?" Dear Man: "That's just it. I am agreed, but she isn't. I, of course, want her to harmonise with me, but she insists that I shall harmonise with her. Just like a woman, you know. Bound to have her own way."

An Excellent Plan.

MOTHER (anxiously): "I am told that your husband plays cards every night at the club; plays for money, too." Married Daughter: "That's all right. He gives me all his winnings——" "What, do you——" "And he always plays with Mr. Nexdoor." "What difference can that make?" "Mrs. Nexdoor makes her husband give her his winnings, too, and then she gives the money to me, and I hand her what my husband has won from hers, and so we both have about twice as much money as we could get out of them otherwise."

Too Severe a Test.

SWEET GIRL: "Is your love for me absolutely unselfish?" Adorer: "Absolutely." Sweet Girl: "Then I wish you'd go somewhere else to-night. Jack Hansom promised to call."

Too Old for a Sister.

"No," said Miss Elder, kindly, but firmly, "I cannot marry you, but I'll be a——" "Thanks, Miss Elder," interrupted the rejected one, spitefully, "but I have two grandmothers."

Lost Her Bet.

HER MOTHER: "I saw him kiss you. I am terribly shocked. I did not for a moment imagine he would take such a liberty!" Herself: "Nor did I, ma. In fact, I bet him he daren't."

Pressing Business.

TRAVIS: "But really you must excuse me now, gentlemen, I have pressing business elsewhere." Bloodgood (aside to Selby): "What he says is true. This is the evening when Travis calls on his girl."

Simplest of All.

PRETTY WIFE: "I knew you'd like this new hat, darling. It is so becoming, and nothing could be simpler, could it?" Darling (thoughtfully): "Nothing, except the man that has to pay a guinea for it."

Ready for Emergencies.

FIRST TRAVELLER: "Does your daughter speak the languages?" Second Traveller: "Not to any extent! She can say 'yes,' though, in five of them, in case any foreign nobleman should ask her to marry him."

Didn't Work.

HE: "How charming you look, dear, in that new dress It becomes you admirably." She: "Oh, yes! That's an old story. When the season is changing you always discover how charming I am in my old clothes!"

A Terrible Disease.

NEARLY every man has the collecting fever at least one time in his life. It may be coins, or it may be foreign stamps, but the very worst form of the disease is that which comes when he is vainly trying to collect money enough to pay his bills.

Hints on Health.

DON'T shake a hornet's nest to see if any of the family are at home. Don't try to take the right of way from an express train at a railway crossing. Don't hold a wasp by the other end while you thaw it out in front of the fire to see if it is alive.

Cards and Cards.

THE deacon's wife wanted to jot down the text, and leaning over to her scapegrace nephew, she whispered: "Have you a card about you?" "You can't play in church," was the solemn, reproving answer; and the good woman was so confused that she forgot all about the text.

A Safer Purchase.

"ONE strong point about this broom," said the grocer, "is the handle. It is made of tough, seasoned wood. You could knock a man down with it, and not break it." "I think," observed Mr. Enpecque timidly, "I would—hum—prefer one with a fragile handle, if you please."

Her Wish Was Granted.

"OH, I think it must be so nice to be connected with a newspaper," said Miss M[illegible]nn to young Quilldriver, as they sat together one evening. "Yes, it is so," he replied. "But why do you think it is?" "Why, it has so many advantages. I should think you would glory in the freedom, the power, the liberty, and all the privileges of the Press." "Certainly I do. It's a pity with all your enthusiasm on the subject that you are not a journalist." "I think so too; but you know it is hard for a woman to get recognition. I should be delighted to feel that the Press embraced me." "Oh, you would, would you? Great Scott! wait till I turn down the gas."

An Old Maid's Ring.

A Charming Little Narrative of Two Love Affairs.

"My dear sir," said the old gentleman, looking over the rims of his eye-glasses at his nephew, who stood on the other side of the table at which the uncle was seated, "if you persist——"

It was an ominous sign when Mr. John Craddock addressed his nephew as "my dear sir," and the break-off of the sentence was still more ominous. Stephen Burrell recognised that the crisis had come, and there was a momentary sinking of his heart; but this transient sentiment left him more determined than ever.

"I am in love with Katie, sir, and I intend to marry her!" he responded in a firm tone.

The questioning look in Mr. Craddock's eyes died away, and its place was taken by an expression of anger.

"If you marry Miss Holmes in spite of my disapproval, you take the consequences. You had better make up your mind at once, because I would rather that you leave the house as soon as you can if you act contrary to my wishes!" cried Mr. John Craddock wrathfully, his temper getting the best of him.

"Very well, sir!" was the calm rejoinder. "I will leave to-day!"

He turned on his heel and strode from the room. He heard his uncle say something; it sounded like "ungrateful rascal," but he took no notice.

By evening he was clear of the house, he and his few belongings, and located in rooms in another part of the town. Then Stephen Burrell had time to reflect. He had expected trouble in abundance when he announced his determination to act contrary to his uncle's desires, but he had only vaguely supposed that the old gentleman would go so far as to turn him out. That was what it amounted to, set down in cold black and white.

He was the orphan son of a younger sister of John Craddock, a bachelor, and had been brought up by him as an engineer; he had proved his fitness for the profession, and had great hopes of rising in it, but as yet he was young and his income from his profession was not large. Katie would not have the same social position as she would have enjoyed had Mr. Craddock relented, but there was enough to live on in a small way; he would get on in course of time, and money was not everything. He would prefer to forego the undoubted advantages of being Craddock's nephew and heir rather than give up Katie; and he fully believed that she would be happy with him and regret nothing.

"Ungrateful rascal!" That was rather hard on Stephen, but it might seem to uncle John that it was quite correct. Still, uncle John should be reasonable. Why should he wish to make his nephew miserable? Katie was poor, and uncle John was hoping and expecting that he would marry a girl in his, Mr. Craddock's, station of life—perhaps the daughter of a nobleman. Money will often buy a title!

Katie had to be informed of what had happened. She looked sad, and, after a moment, tears came into her eyes.

"But, surely," began Stephen wonderingly, "you don't regret the money? You want me for myself, don't you?"

"How could you think otherwise?" asked Katie reproachfully. There was a pause, for you cannot expect a girl (or anyone else) to speak while a strong arm is squeezing her waist and a pair of lips are pressed against hers. "I mean—— How rough you are, Steve! I shan't come near you if——Keep back, now!"

As Steve approached her, and she backed towards the door. "I mean, I am sorry to have been the cause of your losing a fortune and a chance of getting on more rapidly in your profession!" And again the sad expression overshadowed her pretty face.

"You needn't be sorry in the least about that! I had to choose between that and you, and I selected the better part. So long as *you* do not mind the loss—do you, Katie?"

He approached her with outstretched arms and such an appealing expression of inquiry that she really hadn't the heart to wave him back.

"Then we will be married as soon as we can get the necessary preparations completed—the house and all that. It's lonely for you, Katie, here in lodgings, with that old landlady, and going backwards and forwards to an office every morning."

"I don't go backwards to the office!" retorted Katie, with assumed innocence, for which she naturally had to pay the lover's penalty.

"I wonder why uncle John developed into a crusty bachelor?" said Stephen Burrell thoughtfully. "Why didn't he marry?"

"Perhaps he fell in love with a girl who wouldn't have him?" suggested Katie.

"Ah! That would be enough to make any fellow crabbed!" agreed Steve cordially.

"I have a maiden aunt," said Katie, "but she isn't at all sour; just the very opposite. She lives in Yorkshire, and I haven't seen her for ten years, I daresay. But she is a dear old thing, and if she had money she would always be doing good with it. A woman like that ought not to have been passed over. I wonder why she didn't marry?"

As Stephen could not answer that question, he said nothing and the matter dropped.

It took longer than either the lovers thought to make what Steve had termed "the necessary preparations," but all was in readiness at last, and the two young people were having their last chat before meeting on the wedding eve.

Steve had asked her once more to assure him that she did not love him less on account of his fall from fortune, and Katie had once more expressed the hope that he would not regret the choice he had made.

"Money is not so powerful as it is supposed to be," said Steve earnestly. "The true love of a good woman will do more than any amount of money can do for a man; she will help him in his difficulties, console him in distress or defeat, encourage him to go on, and make home a little paradise for him to return to after the wanderings and worries of that crooked path which we call 'business.' The fact that you marry me without fortune shows that you love me for myself alone, and I regret nothing! I shall never regret, for I shall never grow weary of my dear wife!"

And in her turn she said:

"You have made a great sacrifice, Steve, dear, for the love of me, and such a sacrifice can only strengthen the love of a woman for him who makes it! Why should I be sorry for the loss of money?"

Brave words on either side, but would the vicissitudes of life bring about a change?

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A piece of wedding-cake and a card were sent to uncle John, but he tossed it into the fire, as he had done with the letter Steve sent him to tell him the date and place of the wedding, and to ask him to be present. The young couple hoped that uncle John might relent, but he did not.

Four years went by with a rapidity that appeared surprising to Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Burrell when they looked back; but in reality the time had been tolerably long and had brought changes, successes and disappointments, as it does to most mortals. For the first twelve months the course of life and love had run smoothly enough, but after the expiration of the first year there came a change.

The anticipated rise in the profession had not come so quickly as it should, in justice to his abilities; so thought Steve, and there was a good deal of truth in this opinion, but Steve had yet to learn that a man is not absolutely certain to obtain a reward according to his merits. The increasing expense of the household did not make things any the more smooth, and the further additional increase at the end of the third year did not mend matters. There grew up within the recesses of Stephen Burrell's heart a feeling that he had not done well in taking John Craddock so quickly at his word. The old man might have changed his mind if they had waited—Steve began to include Katie in his own action—and in any case it would have been better to wait. Perhaps, and this was a thought which he at first scarcely dared to permit for a moment in his mind, he himself might have changed! His cheeks flushed when the thought first came to him, but it came again and again until he began to feel pretty certain that he would have changed had he waited.

On her side, Katie could not help feeling at times that a little larger income would be a blessing. It was a disappointment to her that Steve had not made more headway in his profession, although she was far from blaming him. She still loved him as much as ever. How different it might have been had uncle John relented! But he had never given any sign of life from that day to this. Perhaps the cares of a mother told upon her temper a little, and she was, unconsciously, less careful about making things at home so comfortable as they used to be. Steve thought she was sorry that she had wedded a man who was *not* John Craddock's heir, and that made things worse. Katie noticed the change in him and believed that he regretted the sacrifice he had made in marrying her, and that imbittered her existence and gradually engendered resentment.

"I did not ask him to do it!" she would murmur.

And so love cooled, and during the fourth year there had been many jangles and their marriage appeared to be one of those that should be classed under the head of "failures."

The fault of these two young people was the very common one of allowing the cares of life to swamp the love which was strong enough to have carried them through life happily. The man, often the weaker vessel in such circumstances, was the first to succumb, and the woman went down with him. But in their case a fortunate incident was to save them from the fate that befalls so many couples.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Katie. She had received a letter and the exclamation was caused by the news contained therein. "You remember my mentioning my maiden aunt, Steve?"

"Yes," answered her husband slowly.

Both experienced a sensation of discomfort, because they so well remembered the occasion on which the maiden aunt was mentioned. How full of love for each other they were then!

"She is dead!" pursued Katie. "I must say I'm dreadfully sorry, although I haven't seen her for so long. Well, this letter says that she has left no estate, because she purchased a small annuity many years ago, and it dies with her. But I am the only surviving member of our family, so they are sending Aunt Martha's belongings on to me."

"They don't amount to much, I suppose?" asked Steve with a smile.

"Oh, they don't mean furniture and ordinary things! I shouldn't know what to do with *those!* But a box containing little trinkets and so on. The other things will be given away to neighbours, as the old lady desired. I don't understand it exactly, but the box will come and the old lady is dead and buried, so I couldn't do any good if I went to Yorkshire."

Steve had to go away for a week on a contract which he had in hand, so he was away when the box arrived. Katie lost no time in opening it and examining the contents. Another letter inclosed in the box gave her some particulars of her aunt's benevolent character, and stated that death came suddenly.

Katie turned over the few things tenderly, mentally assigning a place for each in her own home. She came upon a little rosewood box, of antique pattern; it was locked, and there was no key. Naturally, she wanted it open; she reflected that the locks of such boxes were generally alike, and that she had a key that had opened her mother's rosewood box.

The key fitted, and the contents of the box were disclosed. A faded bunch of flowers, so old that they dropped to pieces as she lifted them—perhaps they were in pieces before she touched them—some tiny ribbons, and other trifles; then an envelope, open, containing another envelope, and a sheet of paper with a few lines on it. She took out the paper and read:

> "I thought to return the ring, but at the last moment my courage failed. It is all that is left of the happiness that lasted so short a time. Oh, Jack, may you never regret your choice of money in preference to love. I pray this for your sake, that you may ever be happy and not have your life imbittered by the thought that you made an unwise choice! I trust that no reflection of my sorrow will reach you; I want you to be happy, and it will soften the pain at my own heart if I know that you are happy."

Katie looked at the date; the lines were more than forty years old. She drew forth the letter; the envelope was addressed and stamped, ready for posting. She noticed that the stamp was the old red one of Queen Victoria, like those she had seen in an album. The letter was sealed, and there was something in it—the ring, most probably.

"Poor Aunt Martha!" murmured Katie softly. "She was much upset to think of sending the ring in a letter with a penny stamp. I suppose her 'Jack' is dead. I wonder who he was? Why, of course, it's here on the envelope!"

She looked and uttered a cry, for she saw "Mr. John Craddock."

Katie's hand trembled. This was the secret of John Craddock's bachelorhood! He had fallen in love with a girl who was poor, and had given her up on that account. Why?

"I'll take it to him!" declared Katie with swift resolve. "I have never seen him, and he won't know me until I make myself known. I think it is due to Aunt Martha."

When John Craddock was told that a lady had called to see him with a message from Miss Martha Norton, he nearly jumped from his seat.

"How old is she?" he demanded.

"Under thirty, sir."

"H'm! Show her in here!" commanded Craddock, relieved. He had suspected that it was his old love herself.

Martha! He lost himself in a reverie and did not hear the entrance of the visitor. His brain was in a whirl; it all came back to him with a rush. A slight cough brought him back.

"Pray be seated," he said, offering Katie a chair. He seated himself opposite her, and so uncle and niece faced each other, the former unconscious of the relationship and the latter trying to sum him up in her mind.

"This letter came to me in a little rosewood box that belonged to my aunt, Mr. Craddock," said Katie, while she was taking the letter from the wrapper. "It is addressed to you. It is very old."

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"Belonged!" cried Craddock, catching at the word. "Then Martha—she is dead?"

"My aunt died three weeks ago, Mr. Craddock. Here it is!"

He took the sealed envelope; his hand trembled so violently that he could hardly hold it. Oblivious of Katie's presence, he tore open the envelope, took out something in wool, and then the letter, which he read with unconcealed emotion. When he had finished he took out the ring and gazed at it. A moment later he buried his face in his hands and wept.

"I ought to be ashamed of my weakness in front of a stranger, perhaps," he said, when he could speak. "But you are her niece and—married?" (Katie nodded). "Then you know what love means; at least, I suppose so. I was in love with your aunt and would have married her, but the pride of wealth spoilt all. I had it instilled into me by my relatives that I ought not to make a *mésalliance* and that I could improve my own position greatly by marrying money. I threw over your aunt and prepared to marry money. But I never married; I saw the hollowness of such marriages and I remained a bachelor. After that, to drown my feelings, I schemed in every way to make more money. I thrust out all the softening influences of your aunt's memory, and incased myself in cold cynicism about 'matrimony in a cottage' and all similar cheap sneers usually indulged in by people who know nothing about it, and I also armour-plated myself in the love of gold. I did all that until it became a second nature; I fully believed it. The awakening has come with that letter."

"Here are a few lines written by my aunt after sealing that letter," said Katie calmly. She meant him to have a full dose of the medicine that was proving so curative.

Craddock read the lines already quoted. They seemed to make him calmer.

"All this demonstrates to the full what I gave up for money," he said quietly. "There is nothing to equal a true womanly love. Some women forget after marriage" (Kate winced, it struck her rather nearly), "but your aunt was not like that, I am confident."

"I—I have nothing more to stop for, I think," said Katie nervously. She wanted to make herself known, but hesitated.

"Tell me all you know about her first, Mrs.—— I fancy that your name was not given to me, madam."

"Mrs. Stephen Burrell."

Again Craddock sprang from his seat in amazement. He hesitated a moment, as if ashamed, and then held out his hand.

"I am having my sins brought home to me all at once. Will you forgive me?"

Stephen Burrell was not made acquainted with the foregoing episode for a fortnight, for on the very same day he met with a severe accident and was taken to a hospital. It was during that illness that he realised how he had fallen from the high ideal of love that had possessed him four years ago.

"I haven't been quite so good to you, Katie, dear, as I ought to have been, but I'll make amends if I get better. I——"

"You *will* get better, Steve, so don't worry. I want you to get strong, for I have something to tell you."

"Who is looking after the children?" he queried with sudden fear that she had bad news to tell him.

She saw his anxiety and decided to tell him the news at once; it would not excite him more than his fear for the little ones.

"Uncle John is taking care of them, Steve!"

He opened his eyes in wonder. And then she told him.

"But I am not sure that he will leave you all his money, Steve," she added with a smile. "He is beginning to regard money as a great evil, and may only give us a little."

"I don't care!" replied Steve earnestly. "I have learnt something from the love affair of Uncle John and Aunt Martha, Katie!"

"So have I, dear," she said kissing him. **R. Pascoe.**

Your Editor Chats.

It is not customary for editors to take readers into their confidence, but I propose to depart from the usual practice and to tell my readers something interesting about the paper and about those responsible for certain of the contents.

To begin with, I know for a fact from correspondence that a large number of readers believe that "Madge Morris" (who conducts the feature "In Confidence") is the *nom-de-plume* of some unknown writer. This, however, is not so. Miss Madge Morris is a well-known contributor to many of the publications which issue from the same offices as *Short Stories*, and quite an air of romance surrounds her recent history. More than a year ago she became engaged to a young man whose financial position did not admit of his marrying for some considerable time. He was a clerk in the City, and his income was a very modest one, with no prospect of an increase for some time to come. Miss Morris, however, decided that if her *fiancé* single-handed could not make sufficient money to get married on, she herself would contribute to the common fund. Her parents, though, would not allow her to become a shop girl, or to go into trade in any shape or form, so she tried her hand at writing. Her first articles were produced in *Pearson's Weekly*, and she showed herself so capable as an expert on love affairs that I decided to allow her to conduct the new feature, "In Confidence." And I have been very pleased at the result. I have in my possession dozens of letters from readers whose love troubles have been cleared up by Miss Morris, and this fact is gratifying in the extreme. Miss Morris has saved up a good deal of money by now, and will, she hopes get married in the autumn.

This, then, is quite a little true romance, which few of those who read Miss Morris's writings would suspect. I have given you only a bare outline. There is much more to tell—more about her early life, about the romantic way in which she met her lover, about her home life—all of which would take too long to tell here, but which I hope some day you will learn from her own pen.

Few of those who read the stories in this paper realise the conditions under which some of them have been written. "Truth is stranger than fiction," and one day I will tell you some true stories about some of the authors who have written stories for *Short Stories* that will bring tears to your eyes.

In the meantime I want you to do your best to help to make *Short Stories* better known. No paper can be *too* successful. *Short Stories* is a huge success, but some people are never satisfied—and I'm afraid I'm one of them.

How can you help? Well, the best possible way is by getting one, just *one* personal friend of yours to take in the paper regularly. If you do that, I will thank you most sincerely.

Your Editor.

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Mr. Methuselah.

Telling Why He Took a Fortnight's Holiday.

By Richard Barker Shelton.

THERE was an air of subdued excitement in the Bank. For the third time Billy Reynolds, lounging in the window as he pored over the sporting page of the morning paper, looked up at the clock and then at the little group perched on a table, and said: "Where in thunder is Mr. Methuselah?" For the third time the wagging heads of the group announced their ignorance.

It was twenty minutes to nine, and, according to all precedent, the paying out clerk was already a half hour late. Ned Frost slipped down from his perch on the table.

"Don't suppose old Methuselah's getting dissipated, do you?" he asked, with grave anxiety.

"Perhaps he bought a ticket to the theatre yesterday and hasn't recovered from the shock," Sam Paine ventured.

"More likely he heard a joke and sat up all night trying to arrive at the point," put in George Hardy.

"Maybe he's sick," suggested Billy from behind the paper.

"He'd come to work in anything but a hearse," said Paine grimly.

Billy rose from the window.

"It's ten minutes to nine," said he, "Where in creation is Methuselah?"

He folded the paper and put it into his pocket. "Go you three to one, George, he comes in late."

Hardy was considering this proposition when Mr. Greer, the cashier, came in.

"Clark," he said briskly, "you'll have to take the paying out clerk's window for a couple of weeks or so. Mr.—er—Mr.—er—Methuselah"—the word came grudgingly—"is to be away for awhile." He went into the back room, and the group about the table looked at one another in amazement.

"Must be sick," Billy Reynolds asserted.

"Did you hear the old man, though?" said Frost. "Called him Mr. Methuselah, by George!"

"Don't believe he remembers his name," said Paine. "Generally gets over it with a 'Mr.—er—er' something like that."

"What is his real name, anyway?" said Hardy.

"Jones, isn't it?" said Billy Reynolds doubtfully.

"Jones or something similar," Hardy prompted.

"Methuselah's a surer one," said Frost.

All that morning, through the routine work of the Bank, there was a feeling, shared alike by every man in the Bank, that something was lacking.

It must be admitted that the paying out clerk was not a popular man. He never went to the football games; he never joked; he never bought chances in the raffles. Yet, for all that, he was considered a fixture at the Bank, as much of a fixture as the arithmometers or the brass screens. One would have as soon expected the vaults to take a vacation as Mr. Methuselah. As to where that name originated it would be difficult to determine, but the name was more or less of a fit, for the paying out clerk was little and round-shouldered and baldheaded. His face was wizened and wrinkled, and, although it is probable he was not far beyond forty, his beard was very gray.

At closing time that afternoon Paine went over to Frost's desk. "Going to the match?" said he.

"Wait a minute or two, will you?" Frost answered. "See'f I can find this shortage. Somehow I'm excited without old Methuselah here."

Billy Reynolds was done early next morning, lounging in the window, as usual, with the morning paper. He glanced over the upper edge and saw Hardy come in.

"What do you suppose has got into the old codger?" Frost asked, as they took a 'bus a half hour later. "When he begins to take a vacation I feel all broken up myself."

Paine laughed. "Say," said he, "imagine old Methuselah trying to enjoy himself. It would take about three funerals a day to keep him in his normal condition."

"We'll probe him when he gets back," said Frost. "If he tells us anything, it'll be the truth."

"Yes, if he tells us anything," Paine assented.

The wonder occasioned by Mr. Methuselah's departure had not subsided when, at the expiration of the two weeks he returned, the same round-shouldered, baldheaded Methuselah, yet with an air of sprightliness and decision about him which was at once new and perplexing.

As Ned Frost put it: "I'm hanged if I know what it is, but something has happened."

Several days went past, and other changes were noted in the paying out clerk. His reserve had disappeared. Once even he essayed a ponderous witticism. Then came the most startling development of all.

The boys were washing up one afternoon when they heard an apologetic cough behind them, and, turning, saw Mr. Methuselah twirling his hat and looking decidedly ill at ease. It took several moments of preliminary humming and hawing before he found the courage to address them.

"Boys, I—I want to make a bargain with you," he began nervously. "I hope it won't appear foolish, you know, but I want to ask you to drop that Methuselah. Never minded it before, you know, but now somehow I do. If it's all the same to you, I wish you'd call me Mr. James instead." He paused and brushed imaginary specks from the hat. "If you will, we'll all go to the football game this afternoon."

"We'll—what?" said Sam Paine, dropping the soap on to the floor.

"All go to the football game with me," Mr. Methuselah repeated.

"Say it again, will you?" said Billy Reynolds, with his hand behind his ear.

"All go to the match with me," Mr. Methuselah reiterated. "I hope it's a bargain," he added eagerly.

"Why, certainly," said Ned Frost. "Never meant any offence, you know. Names are all one to us. Quite as soon call you Mr. James as the other, Mr. Meth—er—Mr. James, I mean."

"Thanks," with evident relief. "And you'll join me at the match?"

Mr. Methuselah made his exit amid a varied chorus of "Certainly," "Of course," "With pleasure."

"Strikes me, George," said he, "that Methuselah was pretty lively for a man just getting over rheumatic fever."

"Appendicitis, you mean," Hardy corrected.

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"He told me himself it was rheumatic fever," Billy protested.

"Well, he described the rigors of appendicitis very vividly to me," said Hardy.

Billy Reynolds gave a low whistle of surprise. "The old fossil's been stringing us," said he, "and botching it like an amateur too."

"Let's find out what he told the others," said Hardy.

The following day was overcast, and at closing time great sheets of rain were rattling down. The paying out clerk had just slipped into his overcoat when he found a half dozen very solemn-faced young men before him.

"We are here," began Sam Paine, as spokesman of the group, "to state a few facts as given out by yourself, Mr. Methus—er—James, and to ask you to reconcile them if you will."

Paine cleared his throat, and Methuselah, looking very much like an animal at bay, mumbled, "Go on."

"It seems," Paine continued, "that while away recently you had a serious attack of appendicitis, according to your statement to Mr. Harvey, and at the same time you had the misfortune (this is what you told Billy Reynolds) to be said up with rheumatic fever. Moreover, if we are to take into consideration statements made to Mr. Frost and myself respectively, you suffered the pangs of heart failure and were threatened with pneumonia of the right lung. We want to congratulate you on a constitution which could bring you safely through these complications. But, with all these ills your flesh was heir to, you enjoyed immensely a fortnight at the seaside (remember what you told Mr. Clark), and, although you spent the entire two weeks there (this next is from Mr. Gray), it did not deter you from passing a most delightful fortnight at Old Orchard. Pardon us if we question how you managed to do all these extraordinary things at one and the same time."

At first Mr. Methuselah's face was a study of wrath. Then his eyes roved about wildly, as if he were contemplating flight. At the end of the speech he leant against the wall, white and shaken.

"I—I——" he began. "It's none of your confounded business!" he blurted out. He turned on his heel and angrily snatched the cover from his umbrella. As he did so a stream of small white kernels fell to the floor.

"Rice, by Jove!" some one gurgled.

On one side Mr. Methuselah, and on the other the group of a half dozen stood staring stupidly at the white grains. Ned Frost was the first to rise to the situation. He stepped forward, slipping his arm through Mr. Methuselah's, and, as he led him away he told the boys over his shoulder that he knew a quiet place down the street.

F. Hope.

MRS. WOBBLES: "I shall never forget, dear, how idiotic you looked when you proposed to me." Mr. Wobbles (with emphasis): "I was idiotic."

SHE: "Do you believe one's fate can be read in the hand, as people say?" He: "To a certain extent. Give me your hand, for instance, and I can tell that your fate will be sure to be a happy one."

A JOLLY old doctor said that people who were prompt in their payments always recovered in their sickness, as they were good customers and physicians could not afford to lose them. A good hint and a sensible doctor.

BRIDE: "Why, mamma, what *are* you crying for? Everything is *so* lovely, and everybody's been *so* good to me! Come and look at my presents, dear!" The Wise Mamma: "It's the presents I'm thinking of! Every family with a regiment of unmarried girls has sent you the most horribly expensive things—and now they'll all be getting married, and you and Charlie will have to scrape and starve to give each of them something handsomer still! Presents! Oh, Angelina, why didn't you elope?"

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Two on a Tandem.

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"Gone with Shingleton! Why Marjorie promised to go on my tandem months ago. Only last night I told her to be ready at two o'clock!"

"Very likely, but that was before Mr. Shingleton invited her to accompany him on his motor car."

"Asked you!" the young man retorted savagely.

"Whether Mr. Shingleton asked Marjorie or asked me is immaterial. Marjorie has sufficient good sense to be guided by her mother in such matters."

John Amhurst strode towards the door without the smallest attempt at concealing the annoyance which he felt.

"And now, my dear John," the lady continued, regardless of his apparent haste, "as we are alone let me take this opportunity of telling you that I consider it desirable that you should see less of Marjorie. Boy and girl attachments are all very well, up to a certain point; serve to keep a young man out of mischief, and relieve the monotony of a girl's life, but such attachments should not be carried to a point at which they are likely to prove objectionable to an eligible suitor."

"You don't mean to say that Mr. Shingleton wishes to marry Marjorie?" Amhurst gasped.

"He certainly does, and why shouldn't he?"

"Because he's old enough to be her grandfather, for one thing. Wears a wig and paints his face——"

"Mr. Shingleton is a well-preserved man—handsome many would say—who has arrived at years of discretion, and made his mark in the world."

"He certainly appears to have made money, if that is what you mean by making a mark. But what does Marjorie say? Is she a willing victim to the altar of mammon?"

"Marjorie is too dutiful a daughter to oppose her mother's wish. I consider the match in every way desirable, and wish it."

"Well, however desirable a husband Mr. Shingleton may be, he is certainly the most undesirable pilot that motor-car ever carried. If Marjorie comes home alive I shall be surprised."

With this parting stab at maternal instinct John Amhurst hurried from the house, mounted the motor-tandem with empty seat behind, and started at a headlong pace for Barton Hall, the afternoon's *rendezvous* of the Sussex Automobile Club.

For the first time in his life the course of love ran ruffled. As girl and boy Marjorie Daine and he had been playmates. Marjorie was the magnet that had drawn him, fresh from his articles in a London solicitor's office, to establish a slow growing practice in the sleepy Sussex village. Full of confidence in the reciprocation of his unspoken love he had scarcely given a thought to the possibility of a rival; less still to the wealthy stranger who had built himself a hideous red-brick mansion on the outskirts of the village, and aped the ways of a country gentleman.

The jealous fear that burnt in the heart of the rider lent wings to the labouring engine. A wild desire to overtake the motor-car and prevent the inevitable *tête-à-tête*, till he had made one passionate appeal, covered the miles at the topmost speed of petrol and pedal. But, though he knew it not, the interval of waiting, and the bad quarter of an hour he had just passed through, had been deliberately planned, with the object of preventing his overtaking the car.

Shingleton was not given to furious driving, nor indeed to driving a motor-car at all. He was out without his driver for the first time that day, and wisely contented himself with a modest, and strictly legal, eight miles an hour. Had Amhurst contented himself with even the twelve, which the law allows, he would in all probability have overtaken the car at the end of the first hour, in spite of maternal forethought which had given it a start of half as much.

But love is impetuous, the more so when it fears a rival, and so for half an hour the tandem sped at double the legal limit. Then came a sudden stop as a squad of police lined up across the road. Another precious fifteen minutes the angry rider lost endeavouring to explain that twenty-four miles an hour was a bare ten, ere he gave his name and was suffered to depart.

Heedless of the law, the next five miles was covered in record time; then from the summit of a hill Amhurst caught a glimpse of the big car trundling along half a mile ahead. Five minutes more, even at the reduced speed which the sharp twisting descent before him would have suggested at any other time, would have taken him alongside it. But to the jealous lover, conscious of precious minutes wasted, each second was of vital importance. The irrevocable word which would wreck his life's happiness might be spoken at any moment, and casting caution to the wind, he committed the unchecked tandem to the mercy of the hill.

Almost as soon as taken, the rash resolve was regretted. The first bend of the road disclosed a waggon at rest, with panting team stretched across the track, and not an inch to spare on either side. To stop the machine already outrunning the engine, by suddenly applying the break, was as sure a way to disaster as collision with heavy vehicle or horses. Warned by the sound of the motor-horn the carter struggled too late to clear a path. As if by magic the few yards of intervening road vanished under the wheels of the flying tandem.

Yet in the few seconds of anticipation which preceded the impending crash, Amhurst summed up the situation with legal precision. There were two alternatives, a collision with waggon and team or a dash at the ditch. Either meant the wreck of the tandem, but whereas the first would probably cast him in damages to the owner of the team, the latter would, with luck, cast him into the hedge only. He chose the latter course and charged the ditch six feet in front of the plunging team.

Full of anxious solicitude, the waggoner helped him from his prickly couch, and the two lifted the tandem from the ditch. To Amhurst's unspeakable joy the machine was uninjured, and with scarce a word of reproach to the cause of his spill, he mounted and rode off.

But at the end of a mile the engine showed signs of failure. Weak explosions came at irregular intervals, and finally ceased. A hasty examination discovered the cause of failure. The petrol tank was empty. Whilst the tandem lay on its

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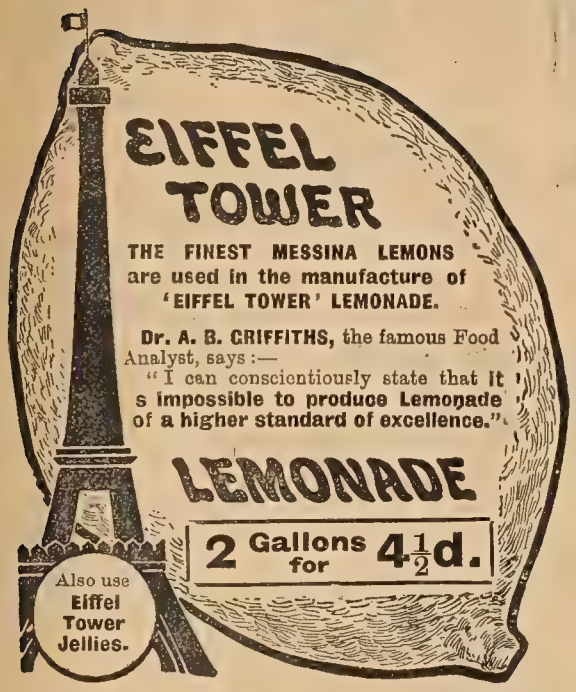
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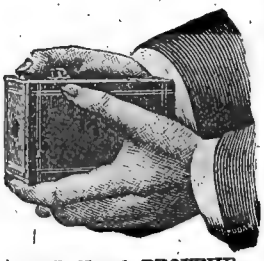

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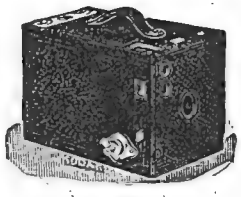

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side in the ditch the oil had escaped, leaving only sufficient to carry it thus far. Two miles off the road to Barton Hall lay the nearest village where more could be obtained.

Amongst the automobiles drawn up in front of Barton Hall, Amhurst, who arrived ten minutes behind it, recognised the big 24 h.p. car, painted a brilliant red and shimmering with polished brass like a fire engine, which had carried the couple he sought. But neither Marjorie nor Shingleton were amongst the guests grouped on lawn or terrace.

With the intention of making a systematic search he started round the extensive grounds, but once more that day Fate was against him. Scarcely had he gone a step when he found himself face to face with Dolly Hamilton. The young lady had, as she promptly informed him, driven to the Hall with her brother. Unattached men were scarce that afternoon, and for the rest of the day he was Dolly's prisoner.

Once or twice as they wandered through the gardens Amhurst caught a passing glance of Marjorie and Shingleton. To his eager, jealous eye a multitude of signs carried conviction that his worst fear was realised. In Shingleton's pompous air of proprietorship he read the accepted lover. And Marjorie, she looked a trifle agitated, resigned rather than happy, he thought.

But the weariest day must have an end. Hamilton, full of brotherly wrath at the hours he had been kept waiting, at last carried Dolly off, and Amhurst was alone with his aching heart.

He was the last of the guests to leave the Hall, and just in front of him, in the long line of automobiles making for the Park gate was the great red car of evil destiny. He wondered what his feelings would have been at the moment had he managed to overtake it earlier in the day.

As he wondered the car passed through the gate, and, badly handled, turned too abruptly. Its front wheels ran into the ditch at the road side and its two passengers were shot out. Ere the luckless driver could scramble from the ditch Amhurst had flung himself from the tandem and extricated Marjorie.

Thanks to the soft resting-place each had found, neither was injured. But with the heavy car it fared not so well. When at last, with the help of a group of grinning rustics, it stood upon the road once more, both front wheels were found to be hopelessly buckled.

The vacant seat on the tandem offered the only means by which Marjorie could reach home that night, and with chilling courtesy vehicle and driver were placed at the lady's disposal.

Standing by the side of the wrecked car Shingleton watched the tandem till it disappeared round a bend of the road, as full of jealous rage as Amhurst.

For a mile the tandem sped silently through the twilight, then a voice from the back seat sobbed, "Oh, Jack, don't be angry. Mother made me do it."

"I'm not angry," was the reply, in tone that belied the words. "I congratulate you!"

"Congratulate me, upon what?"

"Didn't old Shingleton ask you to marry him?"

"No, he didn't!"

Jack pedalled hard for the next mile, though neither the running of the tandem nor the gradient of the road called for such exertion.

"I m afraid your mother will be disappointed."

"Yes, mother will be disappointed. She told me that if I had an offer this afternoon I was to accept—and I haven't had one yet."

There was an accent on the last word that set Jack's heart bounding with hope.

"But I don't understand," he gasped. "Your mother told me——"

"Jack, he didn't get a chance."

"Marjorie, you wouldn't think of disobeying your mother."

"Oh, no, Jack!"

Jack was a nervous fellow, and for a time he pedalled in silence, then without turning his head, he blurted out, "Will you marry me, Marjorie?"

"You don't deserve it, Jack," was the reply; "neglecting opportunities as you do. But I suppose I must do as mother told me."

A. Clarke Little.

AN ALLIANCE IN LOVE.

"So it seems we are both engaged to him, Mabel?" observed Miss Pauline.

"Apparently; I know that I am," answered Mabel.

"And I know that I am. Why, our rings are just alike."

"He must buy them by the dozen."

"Why, even the dates on them are the same."

"That's true. He proposed to me just before the German band began."

"And to me just after. What a wretch!"

"It's too bad. He was the only man I was engaged to last summer that I cared to invite to call on our return to town."

"He used to say terribly disagreeable things about you."

"They were nothing to the things he used to say about you. I hope, though, that this won't make us friends to any less degree."

"By no means. I wouldn't have him now if he were free."

"Nor I. And yet it would be foolish for us to give him up. He was lots of fun."

"True. How handsome he used to look when he gazed down into my eyes, and vowed that I was the only woman in the whole wide world he had ever loved."

"Yes, he was handsome when he did that. Pauline, we must punish him."

"But how can we?"

"I'll manage that. You don't suppose I have managed mamma and papa all my life for nothing, do you?"

"Well, how shall we do it?"

"We will both continue to be engaged to him, dear."

"Very well."

"We will inform each other when he is expected to call. On days when he has an engagement to call on you I'll send him a note asking him to call on me. He can't call on both, and of course he will have to tell fibs to one. When a man fibs to a girl he eases his conscience by sending her flowers or sweets. One of us will get the calls, and the other the sweets. When he has an engagement to call on me you will do the same thing. Pauline, I see visions of unlimited flowers and sweets. What do you think of it?"

"Why, I think you are the dearest, sweetest, most lovable girl in the world."

"Yes, I think I am; but I do hope he gets a good salary."

J. B.

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[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

Too Much Sewing.

So, "Martha," you are very fond of working a sewing machine, and do not mind if you spend the whole day at this harmless and useful pursuit. But your husband is not quite so fond of the music of the machine as, perhaps, he would be of Chopin or Mendelssohn, and when he finds you at work he grumbles forcibly. Do I think he is unreasonable? Well, "Martha," though fond of sewing myself, I must say I have a sneaking sympathy with your husband. I think it is just a little hard on a man who has perhaps been working hard all day, and wants a little relief from the sight of labour, to be saluted with the sewing machine's honest grind on returning home at night. A wife should be as much as possible at her husband's disposal in the few hours that he spends at home, and I should advise you to keep that sewing machine out of his sight, unless it is an absolute necessity.

❦❦❦

I know of a tragic wreckage in married life due to a similar persistency on the part of a wife in regard to washing. It was the case of an elderly sea captain of my acquaintance, who had just returned from a seven years' voyage. On entering his home, instead of being greeted with open arms, his wife said a few words and resumed some elaborate washing operations she had on hand. Captain B. sat in silence for a few minutes, then rose up and with a very strong exclamation, said "Good-bye, I'm off!" and he stamped out of the house and was never seen by his wife again. This is perfectly true, and though the captain may have been an exception, there are many men who have an equal loathing for domestic work if thrust under their eyes at the wrong moment.

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Time's Changes.

"W. M." has been keeping company with a girl for four years, their ages being respectively twenty-one and nineteen. All of a sudden she asked him to cease writing to her, and after that said she wished him to give her up, not, however, assigning any reason. He has since seen a good deal of her, but thinks her views have changed as regards his suit. Well, "W. M.," a girl's ideas often undergo a great change in four years, and you should not be very much surprised if there has been some modification in her early liking for you. I don't wish to discourage you, but her attitude may be explained by the fact that, while she is still fond of your friendship, she no longer thinks of you as a sweetheart. Ask her definitely to tell you the truth, and if it is as I surmise, face it like a man.

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I am always ready to sympathise with real disappointments and troubles in love. But for a young man of twenty-one, with his future to carve out for himself, to allow his thoughts to be distracted and his whole life confused out of a speculative wonder as to whether this or that girl loves, or merely likes him, or a dozen other small questions, is not to be encouraged. If she does not love you any longer, cease worrying about it, and spend you time trying to get on in the world.

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Are Presents Necessary?

Is courtship possible without presents? "Lawrence" is in love with a girl, but cannot afford to give her presents, and confesses that he is a very bad judge as to the kind of articles a girl would value. In the first instance, "Lawrence" would do better to give her no presents at all, than cheap ones which would be little valued by a girl. But if he should find it possible to occasionally give her a little token of his affection, he should try and give her something which he knows she is in need of. A lot of superfluous jewellery, and such like things, are not, by any means, the best appreciated presents.

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"Lawrence" should always make a little mental note when his beloved says she would very much like a certain thing—say a book, or ornament, or song. By quietly getting it for her, he will not only give her the impression of generosity, but of studious consideration for her tastes. A present now and again which supplies an actual want is really better and more valued than a host of costly things that may be precious but have no actual use. I know a young man who has not given his *fiancée* more than six presents during their engagement, but she will tell you that he is the most generous of men. Why? Because those six presents have always been the prompt sequel to some expressed wish on her part, and have been more highly valued than three times the number of undesired articles.

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The Superior Sister.

"T. K. L." met a girl lately who proved in every way an ideal companion for him. But lately he has met her sister. While the first girl has always treated him with the utmost amiability and charm, the sister has consistently ignored and snubbed him. Yet "T. K. L." says it is the sister that he feels he would really love, as one glance from her is more to him than anything the other could give him. Do I think he is unwise to foist his attention on a girl who snubs him, when he has the undivided regard of another who likes him?

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Perhaps "T. K. L." has misunderstood the whole attitude of the sister. It seems to me exceedingly likely that she has snubbed him not out of any dislike, but because she believes his attachment is for her sister. Such cases are very common, as few girls like to be suspected of even desiring to capture their sister's suitors. "T. K. L." should not equivocate. If it is the sister he cares for, he should not allow any complications to arise with the other girl. He should, however, first make sure that the one of his choice has not given her heart elsewhere, as then he would be a trespasser. If the course is clear then he is not, as he thinks, unwise in following up the suit. He can at least try and gain her attention for his sentiments towards her.

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The Eternal Cooking Question.

"Worried" is married, but fears his wife is a sad cook. Is there any hope of her improvement with years?

Cooks are made, not married. Sometimes, of course, they are married, and then they frequently cease to be cooks. But a girl doesn't become a cook merely because she has become a wife. It's a natural gift, and the result of cookery-book studies are, as a rule, fearsome. In nine cases out of ten it is something like this: You take three pounds of something, and add to it six ounces of chopped something else, with a sprig of this, and a sprinkling of that, and then douche it well with the other. Then you put it in a jar, covering it with an air-tight preserve envelope, and let it stand for two days. Then add half-a-pint of sherry and an eggcupful of unsweetened vinegar, a wreath of allspice, and a branch of cloves. Mix well, and boil for a week. Strain carefully through muslin, and, if you have any mercy on your friends, throw it all down the sink. The best way about cooking is not to bother. Take what you can get and don't grumble. If your wife can't cook, it won't improve matters to season the failure with ill-temper. Swallow your disappointment with your dinner, and when you must have a change take the little woman out to a really good restaurant. Save her from herself while you are about it.

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